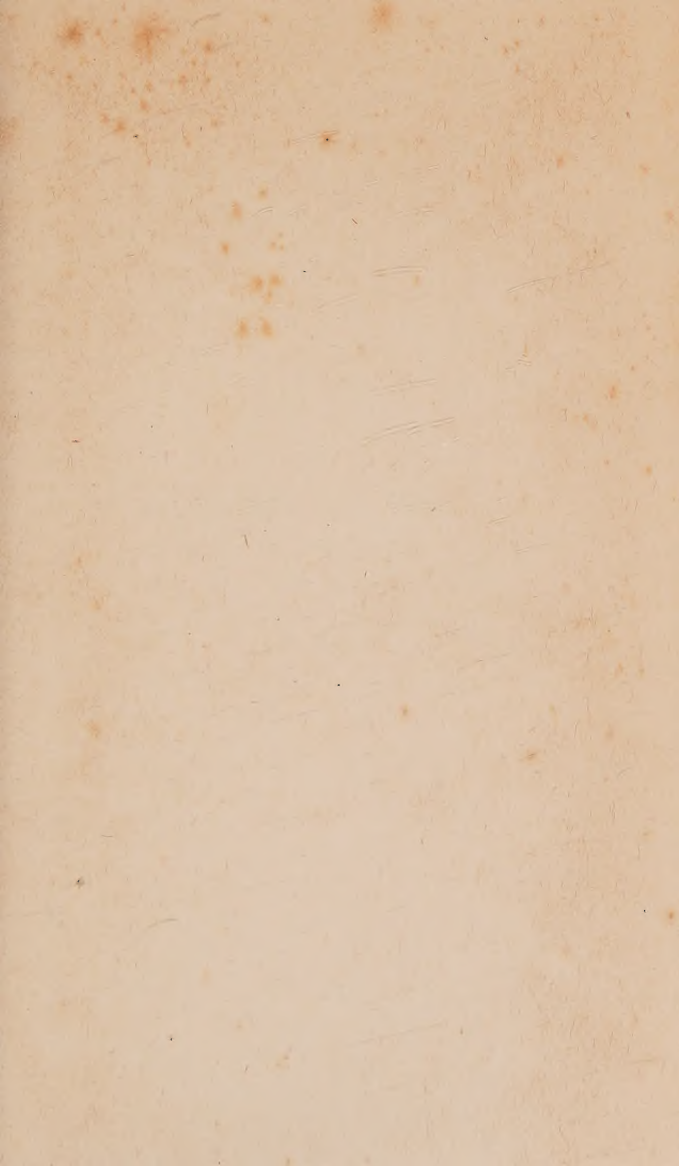


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IT OCCURS TO ME

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QUAINT SPECIMENS

IT OCCURS TO ME

BY
E. V. KNOX



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IT OCCURS TO ME

I. Londoners ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

LONDON is no place for the simple woman or the plain man. They lead a hunted, a persecuted life.

But one must attempt to define the word London.

London is a geographical, and they tell me also an administrative, area. Otherwise it is a mirage, a dream. We pretend it exists. The papers help us in this pretence. They tell us, for instance, that "all London" was there, referring perhaps to a garden-party or a wedding, regardless of the fact that if this had been true the catastrophe would have been more terrible than the plague of locusts or the invasion of Europe by the Huns.

They tell us, again, that all London lined the streets to give a welcome to the President of Czecho-Slovakia, when he arrived at Charing

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Cross. What they really mean is that when the President of Czecho-Slovakia drove by, all those who were walking in the West End streets stood still instead of walking on, and the result was, of course, that the West End streets were lined. But by far the greater part of London has never known that Czecho-Slovakia exists at all. (It does, doesn't it ?)

However, it is in this narrow, fanciful sense that I propose to use the word "London." And I will say of London in this sense that it has one aim or object, and one alone, and that is to affix labels to its citizens. It is, in fact, a gigantic cloak-room, or better still, a beetle case.

In every community it is useful to affix labels, and we can scarcely blame London, seeing that it is so large, for trying to affix more than other towns. But there ought to be respectable reasons. A moderate eminence in the professions, the practice of civic and domestic virtues, friendship, and good-fellowship, ought to put in as good a claim as the invention of the pogo-stick or the wearing of a puce-coloured tie. In London they do not. Where every one spends his time affixing labels, the most honourable are those whose labels are most easy to affix.

The most eloquent orator ? Perhaps. That is not too hard to gauge. But the most patriotic-

Londoners

minded statesman? No. Patriotism is too difficult to measure. The M.P. with the most neatly creased trousers? Why, of course. It is fairly simple to recognize perfect creases, and we are all of us in such a terrible hurry all the time. Where else but in London would it be necessary for a dean to be gloomy to be known? And how imperative it is that the label should not be removed! Have you ever thought of the sorrow of those who write in paradoxes when they desire to say a simple thing, or the woman who is seen everywhere when she does not want to be seen at all?

The plain man does not desire a label. Let him draw near the crowd which spends its time peering through *lorgnettes* and monocles—I often think that for short men and women at receptions and race meetings a periscope would be a great boon—and he will feel at once, “What am I doing here? Where is my label? Was I the man who standardized the rules of Mah-Jongg? Have I invented a begonia? Do I wear pink boots?” And if not, he will blush for very shame.

I was reflecting thus sadly on these things a few mornings ago, looking now at the leaden-coloured sky, which refuses to be labelled as June, and now at the high, squalid houses, which refuse to be labelled as any recognizable

It Occurs To Me

types of architecture, and finding no consolation, when I happened to turn my glance down to the grisly paving-stones at my feet. On one of them was written in chalk :

*Polly Binks is not nice to know
because she is so rude.*

Signed NANCY PRICE
(*President*)

Here, once more, I said to myself, is this morbid passion for affixing labels. Polly Binks is to be stamped as the girl whom it is not nice to know, and Nancy Price as the President of the Suburban Nice Manners Association. It is the same wherever you go. How often have I not tried to talk humorously, agreeably, intelligently, and been conscious as I talked of the accusing eye, the attitude of impatience. "Yes, yes, this is all very well. But WHAT are you ? I have not time to waste on an unticketed specimen."

People talk disrespectfully sometimes about lion-hunters, but the true vice of Londoners is beetle-catching. It does not matter what kind of a beetle it is so long as it has a name. To be lost in London ! What a delicious dream ! Every moment one is threatened by a collector with a label and a pin.

Londoners

It cannot be denied, however, that there are plain men and plain women in London—I mean, plain men and ordinary women. But they are obliged to be very careful. They must forgather timidly and in desolate places. They may go to the Oval, perhaps, but not to Lord's ; to the museums, to the art galleries, but not to the opera ; to the boat-race, but not to Henley ; to provincial lawn-tennis tournaments, but not to Wimbledon ; to the little restaurants in Soho, but not to the great hotels—though even in the little restaurants of Soho they must beware. They must dress soberly and plainly, they must make no speeches, they must win no competitions, avoid being run over in the streets, and equally avoid growing too old.

Only the other day I had a label suddenly pinned upon me by a lady to whom I was introduced after a dinner-party.

“ It was you who wrote that delightful article in ‘ The Pragmatist ’ about ferns,” she said, with an engaging smile. Most fortunately it was not. But the point came only too near.

And now, having penned this lamentation, I am in the gravest jeopardy. I may be pinned down as the plain man of London. But really, of course, I am not. . . .

2. The Little Car



HOW it is that so many people succeed in buying those little motor-cars like beetles I simply cannot imagine. The obstacles seem to me to be insuperable. That is to say, if one wishes to retain any friends. . . .

Whenever the sky looks very blue and the trees look very green, and one feels that it would be pleasant to get quite quickly to the sea and bathe in it, or to the river and punt on it, or to call on Aunt Joscelyne in Hertfordshire, who has not seen one for so long and has so many raspberry canes in her garden, I say at breakfast-time :

“ We really ought to get a car.”

And it is agreed that we really ought.

One is not speaking here, let me make it plain, of the kind of car which is possessed by the inordinately well-to-do. That kind of car, I imagine, comes to one softly with a whisper like the Greek temple in the hollow of the park, or the peacocks on the lower lawn. One is speaking, as I said, of the small car. One is, in fact, constantly speaking of the small car.

The Little Car

And money is not an obstacle to the purchase of the small car. Oh, no! By a process of reasoning familiar to students of economics it has long ago been settled that it is really a saving to have a small car. I need not set forth the arguments in detail here; it is sufficient to mention the abandoned expenses of railway journeys, the natural abstinence from other and more costly pleasures, the increased volume of fresh air, the quick relief from the worry and overstrain of work. One has already calculated exactly what it will cost to feed the small car, and where it will make its toilet and sleep. One has long had a feeling, in fact, that one is really wallowing in unjustifiable luxury by *not* having a small car.

Nor is the obstacle of a mechanical kind. In the bad old days it used to be. I used to feel then, whenever I was taken for a ride in a small car, that thank heavens at any rate I was not driving the thing. Even so, I used to consider myself in the light rather of a student in an operating theatre than of a man who was being taken for a ride. Sooner or later there was certain to be an autopsy, and I was certain to have to hold on to something, and hand something else, whilst the owner rummaged about in the entrails and twilight gathered on the Great North Road. And things

It Occurs To Me

used to go pop oftener then than they do now.

"Hullo! Is that a tyre?" the driver used to shout.

"No, I don't think it was a tyre exactly," I used to reply, hoping that he would find some jollier explanation if I only soothed him down.

"Perhaps it's the exhaust," he would say.

"Ah, yes, the exhaust," I would murmur, sinking back with a sigh.

And then something would go pop again.

But nowadays, they tell me, even the driver does not have to understand anything about the organs of the small car in order to drive it. He only has to learn two or three movements with the fingers and feet, and placate the animal at intervals with water and oil. He does not even have to get out and develop handle trouble in front whenever he wants to go on again. A child can drive a modern small car. A child, in fact, frequently does. They tell me that even I, if I gave my whole soul to it, should be able to learn in time.

The real difficulty in buying a small car lies in the people who have bought one already. Now and then, on one of the mornings when I have said, "We really ought to get a car," I meet somebody who has got one and is proudly driving his wife or his dog about in it.

The Little Car

"Hullo, Elsworthy!" I say, if he stops.
"What kind of car is yours?"

"A Grunch," he says. "If you're thinking of getting a small car, take my advice and get a Grunch."

"How many horse-power is it?" I ask. I always ask that about a car, because it is the only technical question I know except "How many seats has it?" and, of course, when you are looking at a car, you can tell that at once, unless the seats are hidden very carefully in a kind of box. Not that I really understand what horse-power means when it is applied to a car, but I have always a vision in my mind of cars being pulled along by faint and ghostly teams of horses, sometimes 60 horses all white, and sometimes 11·9 horses, 11 skewbald, and ·9 bay.

Elsworthy explains to me how many horses he has pulling his car, and tells me to jump in and come for a spin (why a spin I don't know), because it's such a beautiful day.

"How do you like it?" he says, after we have been spinning for some time.

"Very much," I say. "The cushions were rather too hot when we started, but I feel easier now. Isn't your mascot slightly on one side?"

"Doesn't she run sweetly?" he wants to know, as we whizz along the tarmac.

It Occurs To Me

"She seems to go perfectly," I rejoin.

"Goes well, doesn't she?" he inquires again as we turn off on to the badly worn macadam.

"P-p-p-p-perfectly," I reply.

No accidents occur. Elsworthy dodges all the bicycles and pedestrians, and even the cats, without the slightest difficulty. Whenever we slow down to ask the oldest inhabitant of a village the way, he talks to us very kindly for a long time, and we pretend to understand him, and go on a little farther and ask someone else. It is an absurd mistake to suppose that oldest inhabitants object to a motorist. They adore him. Especially do they like telling a motorist the way. It rather stamps them as men of the world to be singled out for this honourable task, and though they do not exactly know the way, they enjoy suggesting various devices, garnered from long experience, for finding it, and for recognizing it when found. . . . As soon as we do hit the right road we rush along with such tremendous speed that every village begins the moment the last one left off. There does not seem to be any reason in the world why, if I want a small car, I should buy anything but a Grunch. . . .

Until of course, I talk to Parker.

"Take my advice," says Parker; "whatever you do, don't buy a Grunch. If you want

The Little Car

a small car, get a Cambridge-Rossetti." It turns out in the course of subsequent conversation that Parker's car is a Cambridge-Rossetti, and he suggests that we should have a spin in it. We do, and the Cambridge-Rossetti seems to spin quite as well as the Grunch. I promise Parker that I will think very seriously before I get any car except a Cambridge-Rossetti.

Then I met Wallingford in his Artichoke.

"Take my advice," says Wallingford—but you know what he says. Precisely the same as what Carmichael says about his Flick. Carmichael, indeed, the other day actually offered to sell me his Flick when we were spinning in it—although it is the best car in the world—because he was going to buy a larger one. But I pretended not to hear him.

"Do you mind stopping at the tobacconist's at the corner?" I said. "I want to buy some more cigarette-cards." How could I face Elsworthy and Parker and Wallingford if I went and bought Carmichael's Flick? They would never speak to me again.

The fact is that I know men in too many *milieux*. I touch the Cambridge-Rossetti circle and I have acquaintances in Grouch spheres. One night I am dining with an Artichoke, and next day I am lunching with a Flick. How can I possibly buy a small car? My only chance

It Occurs To Me

would seem to be that some maker should produce an anonymous small car. I could meet Elsworthy and all the rest of them with a cheerful face.

“What kind of a car have you got?” they would demand.

“It has no name,” I should say solemnly.

They would hate me for a little. But it would not be any worse for one of them than for the other, and in time no doubt they would be willing to come with me for a spin. And I dare say my car would look every bit as much like a beetle as theirs.

3. Tillotson ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

BEFORE I knew Tillotson I used to have a very naïve conception of political affairs. It seems strange to look back at those old unenlightened days. I used to imagine that our statesmen were persons of keen intelligence, actuated by the noblest of motives and desirous only of the public weal. If they had any failing, I imagined, it was ambition, by which sin (as you are aware) fell the angels.

Long ago Tillotson destroyed all these simple schoolboy ideas of mine. For Tillotson, politicians—the politicians I mean whose names have become household words—scarcely exist at all. The only men who exist for Tillotson are Permanent Officials, or, failing these, the Big Men Behind Things, the Big Business Men.

Some thrilling international crisis would occur on a difficult part of the map.

“Have you read,” I used to say to Tillotson, “that speech by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs?”

“Oh, that!” he would snort contemptuously. “Snoop, of course.”

It Occurs To Me

"How do you mean—Snoop?" I would inquire. "Who is Snoop?"

"Snoop," he would say very solemnly, "*is* Foreign Affairs."

Or, even more portentously, "*Snoop is* Herzegovina."

And it would turn out just in the same way that Jenkinson was Education, and Blisworth was Agriculture, and Perks was War. Cabinet Ministers had practically no say in these matters at all. They muddled along as best they could until they were told to do something by Jenkinson, or Blisworth, or Perks, or Snoop.

I don't think that Tillotson knew any of these people personally. He only knew that they were the Permanent Officials who made things hum. And after a time I did not dare to suggest in Tillotson's presence that even a Prime Minister had any voice in the government of this country at all.

The Big Business Men Behind Things were even more mysterious still. Very often even Tillotson did not know their names. He only knew that they Sat Behind And Pulled The Strings. They usually Sat Behind a particular industry. They used to sit behind cotton, or behind steel. Or sometimes they would sit at the bottom of butter, or be very deep in oil,

Tillotson

or in the middle of rubber, like those advertisements of tyres. And however uncomfortable the posture in which they sat, they always pulled the strings. We used to speak of them very often, Tillotson and I, by the names of the particular industries which provided them with their seat.

“Cotton,” we used to say, “will be indignant,” or “Margarine will never allow that,” or “Wool will get on its hind legs,” or “Oil will foam at the mouth, if that goes through.”

One had a vision as Mr. Wells would put it of vast elemental forces at play.

It was not only in England, of course, that the Big Man Behind did things. I remember that when Prohibition was enforced throughout America I rather childishly suggested to Tillotson that it was a strange revival of Puritan and grandmotherly legislation.

“Puritan be blowed ! ” he told me. “Don’t you know what it all means ? There are big interests at the back.”

“Such as what ? ” I asked humbly.

“Well, the Cinema for one.”

“Why the Cinema ? ”

“Well, the Big Men Behind Pictures naturally want Prohibition. The less money you spend in the saloon the more you spend at the movies.

It Occurs To Me

And then there is Leather. The Big Men Behind Boots."

"Where do they come in?" I said in surprise.

"When people can't sit in saloons they naturally go out for walks," replied Tillotson, "and that wears away boot-leather, don't you see? The whole thing is a Ramp."

I began to learn gradually that everything is a Ramp. The interesting point was to discover whose particular Ramp it was, and behind what exactly the Big Men Who Were Ramping sat.

The Ruhr trouble I remember used to be one of the sorriest Ramps of all.

We had been inclined for some time past in this country to talk about M. Poincaré in terms of extreme or modified adulation, as a strong and masterful man. But Tillotson would have none of this.

"Poincaré! The veriest puppet!" he would declare. "I give that" (and he snapped his fingers) "for M. Poincaré. A mere figurehead of the *Comité des Forges*!"

It appeared then that there were Big Men Who Sat On Blast Furnaces Behind M. Poincaré and pulled his strings.

I think it was rather a blow to Tillotson when the late Herr Stinnes of Germany was discovered and exploited by the Popular Press. Tillotson

Tillotson

would have preferred to keep Herr Stinnes as an unknown force sitting under the railway trains and lurking at the bottom of the coal mines and hiding with an enigmatic smile in the factory chimneys of the Ruhr. So it was that long before Herr Stinnes actually died he had become after Tillotson, a spent force.

"Stinnes!" he would say, with the usual snort. "A mere nonentity! A mask! A man of straw! You want to get at the Big Men Behind him."

I didn't. I was quite content with Herr Stinnes. He seemed to me to make a very satisfactory ogre. But I used to pretend for Tillotson's sake, that he was nothing but a marionette. I could scarcely see his photograph in the papers without ejaculating "Pah."

Naturally I went to Tillotson at once when the country was flung into the vortex, or maelstrom, of an unexpected Election.

"What an extraordinary move!" I said to him. "How on earth do you account for it?"

"Tin," remarked Tillotson shortly. (I think it was Tin.)

I thought about Tin for some time. I had momentarily forgotten the Tillotson phraseology. Then I pulled myself together.

"What is the attitude of Oil?" I inquired.

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"Oil is fairly complacent," replied Tillotson. I believe he said that Oil was fairly complacent, but I am not quite sure. He may have said that Oil was bubbling, or else that the Big Men At The Bottom Of Oil were bewildered.

Anyhow I passed rapidly on.

"Has Haberdashery spoken?" I asked.

"Not with a certain voice. There is a great deal of cross-talk between Jute and Wool. The Men Behind Cotton are coming out into the open."

"And Rubber?"

"Rubber is delirious with joy."

I visualised Rubber for a moment—bouncing, a man of hilarious tyres.

"That is sinister," I said meekly. "Are there many undercurrents in Lard?"

"A few," he replied. "Leather, of course, has been pulling the strings."

"Not openly?" I cried in alarm.

"Of course not," he said with a sort of horror. "But it has Put on Pressure, underground and behind the scenes."

"Oh, underground!" I murmured with relief. "By the way, Tillotson, how do you intend to vote?"

"The Parliamentary ballot," observed Tillotson in a didactic tone, "is, I have been given to understand, secret."

Tillotson

But I do not believe that Tillotson ever voted at all. I picture him as the Big Man Who Sat Behind The Ballot Box . . . lurking . . . mysterious . . . pulling the strings.

4. Political Economy ∪ ∪ ∪

THERE is no sadder contrast in life, I suppose, than that between the romantic and imaginative aspect of seaborne trade :

Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest not sea rising nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest ? . . .

And saw the merry Grecian coaster come
Freighted with amber grapes and Chian wine,
Green bursting figs, and tunnies steeped in brine. . . .

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke-stack
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
 With a cargo of Tyne coal,
 Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware and cheap tin-trays. . . .

And Spanish sailors with bearded lips
And the beauty and mystery of the ships
 And the magic of the sea, . . .

and such pronouncements as the following :

“ If we cease to import a substantial quantity of foreign imports—say forty million pounds

Political Economy

worth—we cease to furnish a market for the same value of home-made goods which went abroad to buy those imports which we are to dispense with, and therefore the stimulus given to one set of home producers by excluding their foreign competitors is given at the expense of those other workers whose exported goods paid for the goods we are no longer to buy.”

And yet it is this latter, this sordid attitude towards maritime commerce which the Government of Great Britain force upon a reluctant people at election times.

It has always seemed a great pity to me that the intelligent elector is not consulted on such occasions about some problem that really interests him, as for instance :

Should closing time be abolished ?

or, if this was considered too delicately controversial :

Do blue-eyed girls make the best wives ?

a question into which the whole Press can enter with a hearty goodwill and a serene confidence that the electorate will be able to judge the relevant issues wisely and well within the few days available.

As things are, the greater part of the electorate is puzzled. I am even puzzled myself.

It Occurs To Me

"This is awful ; England will be ruined," a man said to me at the corner of the road the other day.

"Oh, yes," I said, swinging my umbrella about.

"You have only got to consider raw materials," he went on. "Take raw hides."

I didn't want to take raw hides. I never do. I wanted to take a holiday.

"Or take cotton," he said, warming to it.

I shifted uneasily from one leg to the other. I did not wish to take cotton either. I was carrying a dispatch-case and two newspapers already.

"Or take a manufactured article," he said. "Take tinned salmon."

I looked wildly up and down the road. Tinned salmon meant absolutely nothing to me. I absolutely declined to take it. A taxi-cab came along. I took that.

All over England, in trains, in trams, and in buses, people are telling other people to take things that they have never taken before. Mild men, who have never taken anything except a tonic after influenza, are being invited to take jute, to take hemp, to take specific industries. And they cannot do it. They have not the training nor the time.

Political Economy

The fact is that political economy is a special and intricate study, like philosophy or trigonometry. How relieved we all were when the Einstein trouble blew over and it was no longer necessary to go about wondering whether there was a kink in space or time ! I knew a man who tried to expound the Einstein theory to me in the train. Apparently the theory had something or other to do with trains. If this man had not been obliged to get out at Three Bridges every evening I believe I should eventually have got the hang of the thing. He used to hold the door of the carriage open even after he had stepped on to the platform, and explain volubly to me that motion was something absolutely different from what I had supposed. Then the train used to start, and he had to let go.

But political economy is very nearly as bad. It is quite easy up to the part where I stopped. You take a man living with his family on a desert island and supported by the labour of his own hands. After a time he begins going down to the beach, where he finds a man catching fish and living on fish. He exchanges some of his potatoes for the other man's fish. The two become rather matey. All this is exceedingly jolly. But as you skip a little and turn over the pages, you see chapter-headings like :

It Occurs To Me

MONEY A SYMBOL OF EXCHANGE, or BILLS OF CREDIT, or THE MEANING OF WEALTH,

and you naturally turn to take up a lighter work with a more human and personal interest. It would have been well if some simple patriotic ballad-singer, whose heart beat with the nation's heart, had long ago seized the stubborn matter of economical argument and moulded it into song. Thus :

Montezuma
Met a consumer
Eating foreign rye,
Said Montezuma
To the consumer,
“ Demand creates supply.”

But nothing of the kind, so far as I can make out, has been written. The result is that nobody except a few university professors and Mr. J. L. Garvin know anything whatsoever about political economy, and the ordinary consumer has not even time to consume Mr. J. L. Garvin.

Happily it is only during the short interval which now occurs between the notice of a General Election and the actual polling, that

Political Economy

the British public is expected to take hemp, hides, jute, cotton, steel, wool, and other raw materials and deal with them on the Underground or during the luncheon interval, so that passenger traffic does not remain congested for very long. The ordinary elector who has found himself, with a mixture of pride and alarm, in the unusual position of comparing the works of Adam Smith with the works of later economists, will discover with relief one fine morning that the burden has been rolled away. The only placards that confront him will be one stating,

THE LIBERALS MEAN TO KEEP YOU
UNEMPLOYED

and another saying

THE TORIES ARE GOING TO TAX YOUR
FOOD

and yet a third remarking

SOCIALISM MEANS STARVATION.

This is called removing this discussion from an academic plane into the arena of practical politics. And the fact that there are a good many Conservative and Socialist Free Traders and a certain number of Liberals who believe in Tariff Reform is not allowed to detract seriously from the amenities of the poll.

5. Tomkinson's Bird Story ∩ ∩

I HATE a man who caps a set of serious and interesting anecdotes by telling some perfectly idiotic lie.

Tomkinson is that kind of man. We had started by telling dog stories, true ones—you know how true dog stories can be—and from that we had passed on to telling stories about birds. Almost everybody had some amusing instance to relate of sagacity on the part of robins, chaffinches, missel-thrushes, and owls. And after that we got on to jackdaws and magpies, and, very naturally, to parrots.

There are, of course, a great many foolish stories told about parrots—stories in which the bird betrays a quite precociously human intelligence, and it may be that Jones's story about the parrot which was being taken home by him to Tooting for his aunt, and which said "Season" to the ticket collector at the barrier, provoked Tomkinson's flippant and foolish imagination. Anyhow :

"I can tell you a really good bird story, if you like," he said, and began at once like this :

Tomkinson's Bird Story

"Some time ago a very rich man was found lying dead in his flat. He had evidently been stabbed to death by some long, pointed instrument. The door of the flat was not only locked, but bolted inside ; one window, a large one, was open. No money had been taken, there were no footmarks, no finger-prints—no clues, in fact, at all. The utmost efforts of Scotland Yard failed to shed any light on the mystery. Even the newspapers were baffled. It was a service flat near Regent's Park, but no one in the building had seen any suspicious character in the lift or on the stairs. At the same time, owing to the height of the flat, it seemed quite impossible that anyone should have entered by the window."

"Well ? " we asked anxiously.

"I ought to have told you," went on Tomkinson, "that this man was President of the Malthusian Society of England and Wales. He believed in birth control, and believed in it, I fancy (for he was a morose and saturnine man), not so much on economic grounds as because he really hated babies, which were as repugnant to him as cats are to some people. I remember a cat——"

"Yes, yes," we interrupted impatiently, "but what was it that had killed this man ? "

"I told you that the flat was near Regent's

It Occurs To Me

Park," said Tomkinson. "I should have thought that you would have guessed. He was killed by a stork from the Zoo."

We were not amused.

6. On A Personal Matter ♪ ♪

Camphor, Tristram ? Not like that, believe me,
Colds like mine are lifted from the chest,
Doctors' drugs are light and cannot touch them,
Ah ! they live, because so deep suppressed.

I WISH to say a few words about my colds. I find that a great deal of misunderstanding still obtains amongst the people whom I habitually meet in regard to the matter of my colds.

The cold I have at present—and it is an ordinary example of the type of cold which I habitually contract, bears no resemblance whatsoever to the colds which ordinary people take or catch. It is more like influenza, really, except that I rather bravely, and in the desire not to make a nuisance of myself to anyone, keep on coming to the office and bearing up, instead of going to bed, as I should do if I had influenza or as other people would do if they ever contracted a cold similar to mine. For this reason I do not care for the attitude towards my cold which is adopted by certain people who say, quite lightly :

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“Hullo! Caught a cold? You must get rid of that.”

Or “Hullo! You’ve got a cold, haven’t you? Better take something for it.”

Remarks like this betray a complete ignorance of the problem presented by my colds, and often cause me a good deal of subdued and inward mirth. My colds are not of the kind that can be ameliorated, still less got rid of, until they have completely ravaged my whole system and left me little more than a shadow or *simulacrum* of my former self, nor are they of the kind which can be benefited by the application of any internal or external remedy whatever. If it were not that I do not care to make a fuss about my colds, I think it probable that they would be established under a special name as a new disease in British handbooks and treatises on medicine, and that the British Association would have had something to say, in their last meeting, about them.

It gives me, therefore, nothing but a kind of cynical amusement when other people sympathize with me and relate to me infallible remedies which relieve them of what in their innocence and superficial way of speaking they choose to regard as colds.

An even more annoying attitude is that of

On A Personal Matter

certain people in this house who attribute the genesis or inauguration of my cold to the fact that I went to see a football match without an overcoat on. It is true that I felt a little chilly on that day, but, as I have frequently explained, it is not possible that a mere feeling of chill experienced in a healthy atmosphere should sow the seeds of so malignant a malady as one of my colds.

It is quite certain that I caught my cold owing to rashly attending, though quite warmly clothed, a lecture in the Town Hall on "The Meaning of Good," the change from the vitiated and overheated atmosphere of the lecture hall to the damp autumn air outside producing a lowered vitality which enabled the special germs to which I alone am liable to make a successful onslaught upon my organism.

There can be no doubt, I think, of that.

In conclusion, I feel that a little more care and consideration should be shown by people who enter my room at the office with a vulgar and noisy tread, at the same time causing a thorough draught, while I have my cold upon me, and talk in a loud and jocular manner as if they were not in the presence of one who is to all intents and purposes an invalid. As I point out to them repeatedly, it is only because I am rather a dogged person who despises

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pampering and coddling, and refuses to stay away from his work, that I do not complain and make a fuss about my cold.

7. Butterwell ~ ~ ~ ~

FORTY yards ahead of him Butterwell perceived a great danger. He saw Atkinson approaching.

At no time did it give him any sensation of pleasure to see Atkinson, who was poorer than himself, socially inferior, and inclined to be familiar. Now especially, when he was walking along the pavement of a street where almost anyone of importance might see him, and walking with none other than Sir Reginald Boom, the idea of meeting Atkinson was indescribably bitter.

Butterwell was a man who could never be present in any place where two other people were also present without instinctively classifying himself and them as A, B, and C, and acting in accordance with that classification. Otherwise dull-witted, he estimated shades of importance to a nicety. He had done it for forty years, and grown plump on it. On a railway platform, out in the street, at any social gathering, he had his labels ready. First, second, third class, and so on. If he happened

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to be A, he avoided talking to B and C. If he was B, he talked deferentially to A, and failed to notice C. If he was C, he paid a certain amount of attention to B, but made it perfectly clear that he considered A the nobler and finer quarry.

But now he was B. Very much B, since he was equally desirous of standing well with Sir Reginald Boom and of keeping Atkinson in his place. He would have liked to cut Atkinson altogether. In most cases when he found himself placed in a B position he did cut C. But Atkinson was not very easy to cut. He lived in the same village as Butterwell, and travelled up and down by the same train. He was on certain village committees on which Butterwell also, but far more importantly, figured. And a day or two ago he had lent Butterwell his pencil, a pencil with a silver case. Atkinson was just the kind of man who, if he saw one walking with Sir Reginald Boom in a fashionable street, would come up and ask for his pencil. The man had no tact. What was worse, his clothes were undeniably shabby.

All these thoughts passed very rapidly through Butterwell's brain as he conversed with Sir Reginald Boom and saw the peril of Atkinson approaching. He had a mind which, in emergencies like these, could think very swiftly and

Butterwell

clearly, and, if need be, take momentous decisions. He wanted Sir Reginald Boom to think well of him, and Sir Reginald Boom would certainly think worse of him if he knew him to be an acquaintance of a fellow like Atkinson. There was yet, however, a hope, a faint hope, of escape.

Sir Reginald and he were walking close to the edge of the pavement, and Butterwell was outside. A dozen yards farther on a large coster's barrow stood by the kerb piled high with bananas and oranges. It occurred to Butterwell that if he could so time matters as to walk the other side of this barrow at the moment when Atkinson passed, he might appear not to have noticed Atkinson. Fortune favoured him; fortune and skill together. Exactly as Atkinson reached the farther end of the barrow, Butterwell, with a completely casual and unconscious air, stepped off the kerb into the roadway.

* * * *

The jury returned a verdict of death by misadventure, completely exonerating the driver of the motor-bus from any blame for the catastrophe, and expressing their sympathy with the relatives of the deceased.

8. The Bittleigh Debating Club

THE meetings of the Bittleigh Debating Club take place in a small room which is part of the Village Institute. Mrs. Langton organized the Club, but it was not known for some time that it was going to be a debating club or where it was going to meet. Several gatherings of prospective members were necessary to decide these points. Major Jubb suggested that we should use a converted army hut, and said that they could be bought at Earl's Court. Mrs. Marlow inquired who was going to convert the army hut, and Somerby replied, "The Vicar." (Laughter.)

Mrs. Wright asked how much an army hut would cost, and Major Chubb said, "About seventy pounds." Somerby said that we ought to be able to buy a White City for that. I said, "Why not buy a White City and lend the wobble-wobble to the Institute for fête-days?" but nobody paid any attention to me.

Somerby said, give him the bricks and mortar and he would undertake to build a club

The Bittleigh Debating Club

for less than seventy pounds with his own hands. Somerby is that kind of man. But none of us seemed to have any bricks and mortar about us, so his proposal fell to the ground.

Finally, it was decided to hire a room from the Village Institute, and Colonel Bohun, who is rather rich, offered to present the Club with a glass-case containing a stuffed stoat. His offer was gratefully accepted.

Several people considered that the Club ought to be used for Bridge, and several other people that it ought to take in a number of higher-class periodicals. But a serious difference of opinion arose between Colonel Bohun, who feels the cold after Singapore, and Commander Brown, who feels the heat after the grey North Sea, as to what constitutes a higher-class periodical, and a still more serious difference of opinion as to what constitutes Bridge. Somerby suggested Badminton, and I said "Pogo." In the end it was unanimously agreed that the Club should be used for debating, and should bear the name of "The Bittleigh Debating Club." Much pleasure was caused by the announcement that Mrs. James of "The Towers," who is democratic after the Colonies, had consented to join the Club, and much disappointment at news that Mrs. Hope

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of "The Larches," who is exclusive after Kensington, had not.

Somerby was elected secretary, and asked me to propose subjects for debate. After some thought I drafted and sent to him the following resolution :

That the Bittleigh Debating Club heartily approves of the objects aimed at by the League of Nations, deprecates any resort to military action before the dispute in question has been referred to the Council of the League, and considers the support of the League represents the only hope of restoring a stable economic condition in Europe.

On the evening appointed for the debate I went round to the Club and found the secretary sitting alone at a table with a pile of notes and a new pack of cards in front of him. A very good rule had been made that any member who found himself unable to be present at a meeting must write and give his reasons for failure to attend. The secretary told me to make up the pack for piquet whilst he read the notes aloud. Mrs. Langton unhappily had influenza, and most of the others made fairly ordinary excuses, but Colonel Bohun had written a post-script which ran :

The Bittleigh Debating Club

Happening to glance into the club-room during the course of the morning, I observed that no effort whatever has been made to dust the glass-case containing the stoat since its arrival at the Club, and feel bound to point out that it is, by this time, almost impossible to distinguish what animal the case contains.

I went and dusted the case with my handkerchief whilst the secretary shuffled. We played a shilling a hundred, and he had three *seizièmes* during the course of the evening. I went home rather annoyed and composed a second resolution, which I posted to him before going to bed. It was worded as follows :

That the Bittleigh Debating Club considers Mr. George Bernard Shaw to be the most promising young dramatist since Shakespeare, and looks forward with confidence to his literary future.

I arrived rather late, and the stoat had been dusted before I came. But I had no luck, for the secretary rubiconed me twice. The next day I wrote him a third proposal :

That the Bittleigh Debating Club strongly opposes the Einstein theory of relativity, and considers it to be injurious to national health and morals.

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When the evening arrived I excused myself from attending on the plea that constant debates were too heavy a strain on my slender purse. Somerby answered, "Don't be a fool. Send me a subject with a bit more pep in it or the Club will go phut." As I said before, that is the kind of man that Somerby is.

I re-surveyed the stream of current events and wrote :

That the Bittleigh Debating Club, with a full sense of the gravity of the pronouncement, considers the barking of Major Chubb's Airedale terrier to be a serious menace to the amenities of the village.

We had a crowded house and a gloriously successful meeting. Major Chubb spoke brilliantly. Greatly encouraged, I proposed for the next discussion :

That the prices of Mr. Barker's meat have increased, are increasing, and ought to be diminished.

Mr. Barker is not a member of the Club, but considerable piquancy was added to the lively debate which this motion provoked by the fact that he could be seen in the lighted window of the "Spotted Dog" opposite, consuming his

The Bittleigh Debating Club

regular pint. Mrs. Wright excelled herself, and Mrs. Langton and Mrs. Marlow were both good.

I was now thoroughly in the swing, and, after various consultations, evolved what I still consider a masterpiece :

That in view of the fact that Mrs. Hope of "The Larches" has called on Mrs. Marlow of "The Pines," and that the boy at "The Pines" goes to school with the boy at "The Laburnums," and that Mrs. Wright of "The Laburnums" has lunched with Mrs. James of "The Towers," and that Mrs. James and Mrs. Smithson acted together on the Judging Committee of the last Chrysanthemum Show, in the opinion of the Bittleigh Debating Club Mrs. Hope ought to have left cards on Mrs. Smithson.

Unfortunately, this debate never took place, because Mrs. Hope happened to call on Mrs. Smithson the day after the members were circularized by the secretary.

Colonel Bohun has promised to present the Club with a shrike.

9. Woodcraft ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

“**C**OME down for the week-end,” they said. “You need not do anything at all. You needn’t even play tennis. You can lie on the lawn under the trees and read a book or look at the violets and daffodils.”

I had my suspicions, but I went.

They live amongst trees. Almost from the first moment I perceived that they were people who did not understand the proper uses of a tree.

“What is all that over there?” I asked, pointing to a little corner of the spinney which came right up to the lawn. There were two trestles in a clearing and a quantity of mutilated logs.

The man’s eyes glistened. In his spare time he is an eminent classical scholar.

“That is where I tinker about,” he said. “Carpentering, you know. Did you notice that rough table standing outside the drawing-room window?”

“Oh, yes,” I said. I had been wondering for some time why it had not been taken away.

Woodcraft

“That’s just a rough outdoor table I made myself,” he explained. “And I made this rough outdoor crib for the baby, too.”

I looked at the baby. It seemed to be meditating.

A little later I sat down on a rough garden seat that he had made. Apparently the planks had not been sufficiently planed.

“That’s just a rough garden seat,” he began.

“I know it is,” I replied rather shortly, rising in haste. I did not mind so much about the baby. After all, it was not my child.

On the following afternoon I made my preparations to lie down on the lawn. It was warm. It was also Sunday afternoon, a period which from childhood I have been taught to believe should be given over to rest. I had just chosen a beech-tree with a number of small bright leaves on it to lie under when the man came out.

“Do you mind helping me to carry this ladder down the drive?” he said; “I don’t want to disturb the gardener.”

I had half lain down. I got wholly up.

“I cut down about twenty trees below the place where you were sitting when I came here last year,” he said. “You noticed the lovely view across the hills on the other side?”

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"I should have in a moment," I said.

We propped the ladder up against another beech-tree. It was almost as beautiful as the one underneath which I had been in the act of lying. It had done neither of us any harm.

"I must have this fellow down," he murmured, looking upwards. "I want to tie a rope on to that branch there, so that we can pull it down when we've sawn it through."

I liked that "we."

He went and got a saw. He also went and got a woodman's axe, a long lethal thing, larger than the one King Alfred wears on his great statue at Wantage. He fastened a handle on to the most dangerous-looking end of the saw and told me to take hold of it. We had to lie down to do it. He always seemed to be pulling the thing when I was pulling it too. My best days as a wood-sawyer have for some time been passed.

"I think I shall do a little hacking now," he said after a time, and took several tremendous blows with the woodman's axe. A large chip hit me just over the right eye.

"We're getting on a bit now," he said.

"We are," I replied. "Is there much appearance of blood on the forehead?"

Then we sawed some more. First we sawed on one side and then on the other.

Woodcraft

"We want a lever now," he told me. "Two levers, I think. I'll go and get the iron one, if you don't mind hacking down this piece of wood to make another."

As a wooden-lever-maker I have never yet come into my own, but I did my best. The afternoon wore on. . . . The gardener and the gardener's son came out of their cottage and lent a hand for love. We all took our coats off, and our temples shone.

"We might give her a pull now," said the man.

Three of us laid hold of the rope and one hammered at the lever. I was on the rope. I had a bad stance.

"Get a sway on her," cried the gardener. "Now!"

We got a sway. Then we got another one. . . . The rope broke. I suppose I was getting more sway on her than the others. At any rate I fell down, and they laughed a good deal.

We spliced the rope and went on hewing and sawing and hammering the levers in. Then we swayed again.

"She's cracking now," said the gardener.

"Wait a minute," said the man. "I'm sure my wife would like to see her come down."

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I noticed that we all spoke of the tree as "her" now, though each of us had called it "it" at the beginning. Season-ticket-holders I observe, get into the same way of speaking about the morning train. Probably it was this "her" which reminded the fellow that he had a wife at all. When she came out an idea was started that the baby would like to see the tree fall too. The baby came out and the nurse, and then a housemaid as well. After that they fetched the cook. We began to get a sway again. Everybody was very much excited. I had the tail-end of the rope. We pulled. The man acted as coach to the team. There was a tremendous snap. I went head-over-heels backwards. I rolled down a little slope. The ground was littered with under-wrack and dead leaves. A stump caught me hard in the middle of the back. I looked up. The tree was still there. My mouth was full of mast. The rope had broken again. The baby's clear, joyous laugh rose above that of all the others.

We mended the rope once more and went on sawing and hewing. The tree listed over, the boughs slightly entangled with those of the others.

"She'll come now," said the gardener, "if we get a good sway on her."

Woodcraft

I voted myself into the position of coach this time. "Sway!" I cried. "Now-then-once-more-all-together—*sway*!" She came. She came with a tremendous crash. She lay with all her branches right across the drive. I had not chosen my position as coach quite accurately, for some twigs caught me in the face and my cap was switched rather hastily off. But I joined in the cheering and began to limp towards the house. It was long past time for tea.

"Just a moment," said the man; "we've only got to saw her across in two or three places so as to clear a passage for cars."

"Oh, of course," I cried gaily; "I had quite forgotten that."

My hands were badly abraded by the rope and my hair was decorated with leaves. One of my stockings had come down—but there was still room for a lot more sawdust in my eyes.

We lay down on the gravel and got to work again.

"What are you going to do with this tree?" I inquired when we had finished.

"Oh, I shall just knock up a rough book-case out of it," said the scholar.

"An outdoor one?" I asked. It was the only thing I could think of to say.

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But I knew what to put in my thank letter. "I don't know when I have had such a jolly Sunday afternoon," I wrote, "as the one I spent idling under your trees."

10. " The Outline of Autobiography "

(This work was written as a contribution to the Bittleigh Parish Magazine, but stupidly refused by the Vicar on the ground that it would not appeal to a sufficient number of his subscribers.)

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime.

—LONGFELLOW

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

—SHELLEY

What a life !—CARLYLE

AN autobiography is the life of a person written by herself, and comes from two Greek words, *auto*, meaning a motor-car, and *biograph*, meaning a film ; but autobiographies are also written by men.

It has never been found possible to put the whole of one's life into an autobiography. The first few hours have to be taken on hearsay, and the last few added by a later hand. But as a matter of fact this kind of complete auto-

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biography has very seldom been attempted, because all authors like to read the reviews of their own books. The old Greeks, who lived in ancient Greece, used to say, "Call no man happy until he has reached the end of his life without suffering sorrows," and we may paraphrase this to-day by saying, "Call no man happy until he has seen his Life successfully through the Press." And, besides, one can keep bringing one's autobiography up to date (in fortnightly parts, if necessary). The best age at which to publish the first instalment is about thirty-five if one is a novelist or an actor, or thirty-nine if one is a steeplechase-rider or a K.B.E.

The great advantage of writing about one's own life, as compared with letting somebody else do it, is that one knows instinctively what to omit, and this was quite well understood by the old Assyrian and Egyptian kings, whose monuments are the first autobiographies in the world. Thus the Assyrian kings, who ruled over the Assyrian Empire, never forgot to mention all the occasions when they planted their foot on the necks of the Egyptians, set their hook in the Egyptians' nostrils, scourged them with scourges and yoked them with yokes of iron; but they did not have any pictures carved about the times when the Egyptians

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behaved in a similar manner towards them. We trace the same reticence in the baked-brick record of the life of King Nebuchadnezzar which has just been discovered in the valley of the Euphrates by the well-known and popular Professor Bortsch. Here the Babylonian monarch is seen gazing proudly at the hanging gardens of the great city which he built, and surrounded by minstrels playing on dulcimers, sackbuts, timbrels, and shawms ; but no reference is made to the circumstances in which he ate straw like an ox, or to the episode of the burning, fiery furnace.

It is quite true that both in ancient and modern times there have been persons filled with such a wrong and foolish desire for self-advertisement that they have included their vices as well as their virtues in their autobiographies. St. Augustine, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and De Quincey may be mentioned in this class. But, on the whole, British common sense is sternly and rigidly opposed to giving way to this temptation. The best model for autobiographies is that of Julius Cæsar (the Roman), whose famous sentence, “ *Veni, vidi, vici,* ” may be pronounced as it is spelt, when it sounds quite well, or “ Waynee, weedee, weechee,” when it sounds excessively silly, does it not ? But whichever way it is

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pronounced the meaning is, " I was appointed, I took charge, I proved a tremendous success " ; and this text should hang on the study wall of every young autobiographist. The rest is a matter of detail.

It is hardly too much to say that the failure to write sufficient autobiographies has severely handicapped the whole science of history. Where, for instance, are the autobiographies of the Roman emperors who succeeded Julius Cæsar ? There are none. And what have the historians written about those emperors ? Most unpleasant things.

LEST YOU FORGET

For Practical Autobiographists

THE HELPIT MEMORY SCHOOL
keeps an accurate record of all past
events and supplies them to memoir
writers as required. Testimonials
from Generals, Cabinet Ministers,
Society Hostesses, Racing Men, the
Stage and the Bar.

LECTURES FROM EMINENT MEN
ON WHAT TO REMEMBER, AND
HOW

Write for free
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You cannot do
without it

“ The Outline of Autobiography ”

They have simply laid stress on their weaknesses, instead of pointing out their virtues. What would we not give to-day for a Life of Nero written by his own hand ? Could it fail to correct some of the harsh and bitter statements which have been made about this strong ruler ? Why did he kill his mother ? Why did he burn Rome ?

Probably there were deep reasons of policy behind. And does not this apply to Lucrezia Borgia, Ivan the Terrible, and King John ? No one can understand our little trials and difficulties as we understand them ourselves. The great men of to-day are beginning to understand this. And not only the great men, but the men who are expecting to become great. And how many are there not of these ?

Autobiography, in fact, cannot be begun too early. It is the greatest mistake to leave one's reminiscences till one's old age, as death may supervene before they are concluded, or there may be a strike in the printing trade. In order to be prepared against these chances it is essential to keep the autobiography written up in the form of a diary, including thoughts and jokes as well as events. Corrections, amplifications, omissions (as, for instance, inordinate censure of a person who has afterwards married into the family) can be made

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later, either before the book is sent to the publisher or in proof. All children should be encouraged to keep diaries, which can easily be fastened, together with the pencil, to the sash, pinafore, etc., instead of the useless whistle and cord which satisfied our grandparents when young. The best kinds have sentences already printed on them in the form of questions in order to encourage the young writer, e.g. :

What did little Michael do to-day ?

He

Who was the kind gentleman who came to lunch ?

.....

What did he say to papa ?

.....

What have Michael's reactions been towards his environment to-day ?

(1) Conscious ?

(2) Subconscious ?

And so on.

Further instructions in reminiscence writing is now given in all elementary and secondary schools, and both with pupil and teacher is one of the most popular lessons in the time-table.

A mistake that has often been made by the autobiographists in the past is to confine their

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volume of reminiscences to one set of activities—society, politics, sport, company-promoting, divorce, or whatever it may be. It is now found far better to include all the interests of a varied life in the book, and trust to the strong human *personality* or *character* of the author to weld them into one. He should not mind jumping about from place to place, or worry if events appear to get a bit mixed. There is no need for him to trouble overmuch about accuracy or dates. He should adopt a broad, humane, and tolerant outlook, introducing the witticisms and repartees which he would like to have made rather than those which he actually used. In short, he should be his simple, natural self.

The proper time for publication is bound to depend largely on what is called topical interest. Thus, if the buried treasure of the Incas has been discovered, and the writer has ever been to Peru, now is the moment for him to publish his first autobiography, including a long account of his trip, and three or four pages from the article in “The Encyclopædia Britannica” on Incas, which will be found in the volume called “Hog—Ink.” For the very great this rule will not apply, as they possess topical interest of themselves. They should publish their autobiographies as soon as release from the cares of office gives them leisure to do

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so. But the best bits should be chosen out first and put in the Sunday papers or the "Times." These are called the *hors d'œuvres*.

One of the pleasantest parts of the autobiography, when it actually comes out, will be portraits of the author at all ages, in all climes, and surrounded by varying groups of friends. He will appear as student, tiger hunter, hand-bell ringer, bridegroom, as descending in a diver's uniform to gather pearls, as wearing the insignia of the Green Snake (Fourth Class), as a member of the Klu Klux Klan, or of the Rotary Club in his native town, and last, but not least important, as seated at his study desk writing the final words of his Life.

A notable example of the illustrated autobiography is that of Sir Joseph Bagworthy, O.B.E. (the fifteenth O.B.E. in all Warrington), which is to be published by Messrs Stranger & Fatten this very spring. The book is entitled "Fifty Years of Municipal Life in the North," and is practically certain to be one of the publishing sensations of the season.

II. A Cipher o o o o

OF the sheer simple truth that Mary Queen of Scots wrote the so-called works of Shakespeare I have long been earnestly convinced. With the arguments from general probability I will not weary you, except to point out the intimate knowledge of Court procedure in Scotland (see "Macbeth"), the close familiarity with the French tongue ("Henry V"), the ample leisure for play-writing afforded by a long imprisonment, and more especially Queen Mary's well-known literary gifts in part transmitted to her son James I. She was, as a matter of fact, instructed in the art of poetry by Ronsard himself.

I will proceed directly to the cipher. I had found this in the song which Mr. John Drinkwater unhesitatingly affirms in his play "Mary Stuart"—and who am I to disbelieve him?—to have been composed by Queen Mary herself: a song which he says—and who am I to deny it?—is still constantly sung in the streets of Edinburgh.

It Occurs To Me

The first stanza of this song which Mary wrote and sang is, as you will doubtless remember :

Three names there are, as Lethington,
Moray, Elizabeth ;
By craft of these I am undone
And love is put to death.

The cipher is cunningly concealed, but it is there. Take the first letter of the tenth word, the ninth of the sixth, the fourth of the third, the third of the eighth, the second of the seventh, the first of the sixth, the second of the second, the first of the second, the first of the fifteenth, and the last of the second, and what do we get ?

CORIOLANUS

This is only an example. You will scarcely credit me until you try it for yourself, but there are similarly concealed in this one stanza "Hamlet," "The Tempest," "Othello," "Richard II," "Richard III," "Cymbeline," "Anthony and Cleopatra," and "Titus Andronicus." Similarly in the third stanza, which runs :

Mary the lover be my tale
For the wise men to tell

A Cipher

When Moray joins Elizabeth
And Lethington in hell,

are to be found "Twelfth Night," "The Winter's Tale," and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."

If more proof were needed we have only to consider the last stanza :

Not Riccio nor Darnley knew,
Nor Bothwell, how to find
This Mary's best magnificence
Of the great lover's mind."

There are eighty-eight letters in this stanza, and sixty-three of them placed in their proper order, read :

Find in this how I Mary nor Bacon
Nor Drinkwater wrote "The Merchant of Venice"

The twenty-five remaining letters are :

C, L, E, Y, E, O, T, L, L, O, M, S, B, S, G, N, F, G, R, L, O,
E, S, D, L.

This makes :

Loll on, stern moose——

No, hang it, it doesn't. Wait a minute.

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Loll softly on, strong mice——

Botheration ! That doesn't do it either.

Loll on, stern mole, by Bognor ice——

No, no.

So loll, strong mice, b[y] lefy dels——

Oh, curse the thing !

* * * *

Wait a minute, though. I think I have it now. I was deceived for a moment by the large number of L's. It is not necessary to use the word "loll." The twenty-five letters form a sentence of exactly that kind which we should expect from Mary Queen of Scots. They are an objurgation—a taunt—flung at her fellow-countrymen. Purchase a small box of card-board letters and work out the combinations for yourself. You will find after a little manipulation that the following sentence leaps out, as it were, like a flame :

YE BL—ING SCOTS SELL ME FOR GOLD

And we can understand, I think, the reticence

A Cipher

of a queen and a great lady in omitting from the cipher the three letters that would complete the second word.

I hope that there will be no attempt to deny the Marian authorship of the plays attributed to William Shakespeare after this.

12. Compensation ∞ ∞ ∞

IN the coffee-room of "The Grey Drake" at Wisperton there are five silver coffee-pots, four silver sugar-basins, and three cut-glass decanters, two with stoppers and one without. The furniture is mahogany, ornately carved. The pictures on the walls—— But I will not tell you anything about the pictures on the walls; not even about the meeting of Wellington and Blücher after the Battle of Waterloo, nor the still life in oils—rather a mixed bag, including a melon, a capercailzie, and a hare. On the mantelpiece there are three large, empty china vases, pink and gilt, and in shape resembling funeral urns.

I know about these things because I have had nothing to do for the last three days but to examine them.

That is the fault of the Wisp. The Wisp is a very beautiful river, but it is too narrow and too full of herons and kingfishers and otters and cows to be a really good trout stream.

"There are," I said to Ambrose on the

Compensation

first day, "more cows than fish in this river."

"Bless you," he said, "the cows don't disturb the fish. I caught a pound trout almost under the nose of a cow in the big pool up there a year ago."

"I think the cows must have increased since last year," I said. "I suspect them of eating the trout. In fact, I am thinking of putting a couple of gadflies on and fishing entirely for cows."

There are also too many uncut trees on the Wisp. It was while I was trying to find a quiet pool without cows in it that I slipped on a stone and hit a projecting alder stump with the ball of my right eye. It was very painful.

"A mere nothing," I said to Ambrose later, when he condoled with me. "The stump was not very sharp. It might have been very much worse. I might have run into the horn of a cow."

"All the same you'd better see a doctor," he said. "He'll squirt something into it, and you'll be as right as rain to-morrow."

"I shall not see a doctor," I replied, trying to speak in the tones of a rather robust martyr. "I expect a sportsman can fish this stream as well with one eye as with two."

However, he over-persuaded me. It was

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like Ambrose, I felt, to wish to get me well at once so as to deprive me of a better reason for not catching fish than he had.

"A very good thing you *did* come to see me," said the doctor. "Just look down a moment."

I hate looking down when somebody is holding my eyelid. It is not a want of modesty but a mere personal foible. However, I managed to do it.

"I'm afraid you won't do much more fishing on this visit," he went on kindly, but firmly. "There is a distinct ulceration of the cornea. Iritis will probably ensue. You will have to sit in a room with the blinds down for the next few days. You mustn't read, of course."

For a moment I was filled with profound gloom, but as I walked back to "The Grey Drake" with a big bandage over my right eye I began to feel rather more cheerful. After all, the fishing looked like being very bad indeed.

"Are you all right again," asked Ambrose briskly.

"Practically," I said, with an air of tremendous calm. "With any luck the sight of my right eye will not be permanently impaired. There is ulceration, of course, of the—yes—the cornea; and severe iritis will probably

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supervene. I shall not be able to do any more fishing, but I shall be quite happy sitting here in this pleasant old coffee-room with the blinds down while you fill your creel. Naturally, I am not allowed to read."

Ambrose was visibly affected.

"Look here," he said, "I can't leave you like this. I must stay in and read to you. What would you like? "Glorious Ascot," by one of our most popular duchesses, "Broadwood as I Know It," by Constant Inmate, out of the "Morning Policy" for the fifteenth? Have you ever thought what a jolly garden-party the contributors to a daily paper might have together? Or there's the Great Western Time Table for 1910."

Cunning hound, Ambrose. He thought he was going to get out of it, too. The wind was north-east; there was a grey look in the sky, but not a prospect of rain. I waved him away with a renunciatory smile.

"No, leave me here," I sighed faintly. "I would not spoil your sport for worlds. It will be enough for me to meditate on your happiness. Gather your big baskets and post your pound-trout to your friends."

"I couldn't do that in any case, as you know," he replied, "because of the present postal arrangements. I always say that in the old

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days I could post trout from here to my friends ; now I can only post them to my enemies."

Ambrose has a coarse mind.

" Well, catch them anyhow," I said, " and we will eat what we can. Light meals of fish will probably be all that I am able to consume."

So Ambrose went out to his alders and his cows, and left me alone in the twilight.

That was three days ago, and our meals of fish have been very light—very light indeed. The trout are sucking midges, it seems, or rising short. It is too cold and too bright, and there is not enough water. The trout will not take a yellow fly by day nor a white fly by night.

" I suppose you've tried casting under the noses of the cows ? " I asked Ambrose on the evening of the third day, but he made no reply.

" As I sit here with my iritis," I went on, " in this darkened room, all kinds of pleasant fancies and images come into my mind. At times I can almost bring myself to be glad of my affliction."

" Order me a tankard of bitter," he answered shortly, " while I go and change."

I am really sorry for Ambrose. His trouble, you see, is not only of the moment, like mine.

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It will last. It will never be healed. If we had been out every day together and had no sport we should have gone away and made the best of it. "The fishing was rotten," we should have said ; " still, in the circumstances, we didn't do badly. We killed——" Well, you know the way it goes on.

Or, if Ambrose or I had been alone, we could have made a fairly decent show. But as it is, I am sitting here a perpetual unbiassed witness watching him with my one cornea, treasuring up against him the truth that he kills nothing at all.

I, on the other hand, shall always be a bit of a hero. It is not every one who can manage, in spite of the earnest entreaties of all the daily papers, to imperil life and limb on a trout-stream.

" I think I could have done pretty well on the second and third days," I shall murmur, " but for my wound. It is no use trifling with iritis, of course. A very nasty blow." And the morning papers I take in at home will probably pay me pounds and pounds.

Yes, I am sorry for Ambrose.

I now see that there is another picture, which I had not noticed before, in the coffee-room of " The Grey Drake." It represents a tall gentleman in the costume of a Regency buck

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leaning languidly against a tree by the side of a stream. He has a very long rod and a creel, and at his feet there are seven large trout. I must draw the attention of Ambrose to this.

13. The Third Bathe ~ ~ ~

I SHALL bathe again. I do not care what they say. Nothing shall stop me. I shall bathe again. I shall proceed down the shore gently flapping my gown, and wallow and float and swim under a blue sky in water which is unruffled, glittering with sunshine, and not cold but cool. In water also which is just conveniently deep. I shall not have very long to live afterwards, I suppose, if all they tell me is true, and I should like to take the opportunity of saying farewell to anyone who may happen to read this article. About to bathe, I salute him. He may have my white mouse and the bound volume of "Chatterbox." In a very few moments now. . . .

Whenever the force of circumstances compels me to leave home during the month of August, and the place to which I am to be taken has, after long argument, been decided, I always ask first, "Is there any sea there?"

Some people regard the sea historically, commercially, or poetically. I prefer to look at it as one of the triumphs of municipal

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progress, like paving or gas. If I am told that there *is* sea there, I say, "How splendid! Then we shall be able to bathe."

But why I say "How splendid!" I really do not know, for nothing can be more unsatisfactory than the state of British bathing at the present time. Nearly all the savageries of nature and the restrictive regulations of mankind have been enlisted to make it so. Only philosophy—a philosophy that does not fear death, a philosophy like mine—can conquer them.

Theoretically, the number of days on which it is possible to bathe off the British coast is three hundred and sixty-five. At no period of the year is any portion of the British coast ice-bound or dangerously infested with sharks. Practically, however, the number of days is about twenty-three. Obviously, it becomes a matter of the flimsiest chance whether any of those twenty-three days coincide with any of the days on which the Briton has dealings with the sea.

But the trouble is not ended here.

There is a very detestable type of man, who insists on bathing in the early morning before breakfast. He suborns accomplices, and one goes out to find the sea grey, ruffled, and inhospitable, having obviously passed a bad

The Third Bathe

night. It is agitated. It is heaving. There are white horses upon it. It is in a kind of condition when it wants breasting. You cannot fool about in it, you cannot wallow, you cannot float. Nothing but breasting will do. You get into it and find that it is even worse than it looks, and tastes worse still. Without professing to be a gourmet, I may say that I have rolled round my tongue a fairly considerable number of brands of the British sea. There is the light and heady Atlantic; the glutinous yet stimulating tippie of Scarborough and Skegness; but for real body commend me to the little-known chalk vintage of Rottingdean. There is a strong, gritty flavour about the kind here. . . . But I digress.

When one has tasted and breasted for five minutes of deep suffering one gets out and returns. There may be those—in fact, I feel sure there are those—whose characters are fortified by sorrow. They are the people for whose sake bathing before breakfast in the sea was given to us. They come purged, as it were, out of great tribulation and find that life has a newer and fuller meaning for them. They are more tolerant and kindly towards their fellow-men. I am not like that. I simply get a chill on the liver. Always after an experience like this I decide that the time for bathing, so

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far as I am concerned, is not before breakfast ; and those who have breakfast with me invariably agree.

I have bathed before breakfast to-day.

The obvious time for bathing is much later, when the universe has become a little warmer and the chill, more or less, has been taken off the sea. I say more or less because the sea has never really been anything but chilly, ever. One should bathe, for example, about noon. But when you look out of the window you find that the sea has gone about half-way across to France or America, as the case may be. In my case it was France. One cannot help looking a fool as one pursues a reluctant sea half-way to France at about eleven-thirty in the forenoon merely in order to wet oneself all over without lying down. The white cliffs of Kent become a mere far-away glimmer. Anybody would suppose that one was going to settle the French Debt Question off one's own bat. What I have never been able to discover is whether the fellows who swim the Channel are obliged to keep their feet off the ground all the way, or whether that counts as a foul. In wading, one thinks of many things of that sort in the intervals between the sharper pebbles. I suppose that will be Dieppe over there. . . .

I bathed at eleven-thirty this morning.

The Third Bathe

When I returned to the British coast I found a man standing beside a boat. He was ruminating, and seemed to be a man versed in the ways of the sea.

“ I want you to tell me,” I said to him, “ what time to-day the sea will be just up to here ? ” And I indicated with my forefinger a spot where the beach rose up sharply like the end of a bath.

“ It will be high tide——” he began.

“ I don’t want to know anything about tides,” I said to him gently. “ I’m not a mariner. I’m not even a Younger Brother of Trinity House. I only want to know when the sea will be just up to here.” And I indicated the required spot again.

“ ’Bout har-par-five,” he said.

I went home and had a very large lunch. After that I went to sleep. When I woke up I ate a very large tea. Then I looked out of the window, and sure enough the man was right. The sea had come right up to the deep end of the shore. In about half an hour there would be enough of it for a thorough bath. The surface of the water was calm and bright, the sky was radiantly blue.

I immediately announced my momentous decision.

“ I shall bathe,” I said, “ again.”

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There was a febrile chorus of protest.

"You can't possibly bathe again," they said.

"You've bathed twice already."

"You can't possibly bathe now," they said.

"You've just had a heavy meal."

"Hearty," I said, "not heavy."

"It's really very dangerous," said my sister.

"I heard of a man who bathed three times and got cramp and died."

"I heard of a man," I rejoined, "who refused to bathe more than once, and he was bitten by a jelly-fish that time, and caught scarlatina."

"You'll be horribly tired when you come out," said my brother-in-law. "You'd much better wait till to-morrow and go in before breakfast."

"I'm going to bathe once before breakfast to-morrow," I said, "and I'm going to do it now."

"Any doctor would forbid you," said my sister. "You'd much better bathe at midday to-morrow."

"Never at midday again," I said. "My French isn't good enough. I have a short article to write, and then I shall bathe."

And bathe I shall.

14. Bash-Ball ~ ~ ~ ~

WHEN people ask me whether I play lawn tennis I say, "Oh, yes." But when they ask me whether I will play lawn tennis with them on Saturday afternoon I often say "Oh, no." This is because they do not play lawn-tennis. They think they do, but they don't. They play a game for which no title has been invented as yet, a game which I call bash-ball. Some of them protest at my title and say, "Pat-ball, you mean." I admit that there are pat-ballers, but the pat-ballers are only the young, or else an inferior type of the bash-ballers, as the lemon sole is an inferior kind of sole. Neither kind plays lawn-tennis.

Lawn-tennis is a game we used to play long, long ago, before people leapt about flogging whizz-bangs wildly with circular flails. The main point about the game was that it was played upon a lawn. A lawn—it says so in the dictionary—is a plot of grass between trees. It is wet—the poets say so—and bird-haunted. On a lawn there are strewn leaves and petals and small pieces of stick. Daisies grow on a

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lawn, worms come out, and somewhere about the middle there is a broken thrush's egg. One end of the lawn is much sogrier than the other. Faint lines are to be discerned on it, and two posts, from which a net hangs limply. Part of the thing that runs through the top of the net is made of wire and part of cord. There are no other nets on the ground. And the game of lawn-tennis is played like this :

Clarissa (stepping out on to the veranda) : Come along, or we'll never get a set done before tea.

Edwin (to George) : Help me get the net up, anyway. We shall have to wedge the handle.

(They proceed to the lawn.)

Miranda : I say, there are only three rackets.

Clarissa : Nonsense. There's Aunt Isabel's. She left it last year.

Miranda : Oh, that thing. But it's been in the boot-room all the winter and there are only three strings left.

Clarissa : Never mind. You play with George, and we'll have it a let when the ball goes through.

George (returning and looking tired) : Where are the balls ?

Miranda : Have you got the net up ?

Bash-Ball

George : Yes ; and do be quick, because it's pulling the posts out.

Clarissa (plaintively) : There ought to be five balls, I know. There were five yesterday, and I can only find four now.

George : What was Togo eating a minute ago ?

Miranda (indignantly) : It wasn't Togo ; it was Dick. (*Togo is Miranda's dog.*)

George : Well, Dick, then.

Clarissa : Only one of mother's shoes.

George : That was before lunch. I swear he was eating a tennis-ball this afternoon.

Clarissa (returning from a currant-bush) : It's all right. I've got it. He didn't get his teeth right through.

Edwin (who has been picking up little sticks and berries and things from the centre lines of the court) : Let's try the balls anyway. (*He bounces them all a great number of times on the stone floor of the verandah.*) Only two good ones. We'll have those for the first service.

George (who probably has his own reasons for being suspicious) : No. Much better shout " Good " before serving a good one, and " Bad " before the others. Come along, *Clarissa*.

Edwin (very decisively) : No. *Miranda's* to play with you.

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(The point is argued. After which George spins a racket for choice of ends.)

Edwin : Damn ! The laburnum's a let, of course.

George : Certainly not.

(This is also argued, and the let being abandoned, George holds that a ball which strikes the laburnum should be regarded as having entered the dedans ; Edwin, that it should remain in play, as if it had dropped from the penthouse roof. The matter is finally adjusted.)

Edwin : Good. *(Serves.)*

George : Fault.

Clarissa (to Edwin) : It was the line.

George : It was on a splash.

(The net breaks.)

Miranda (sunnily) : Well, it's tea-time, anyway.

This is lawn-tennis, and practically nobody plays it nowadays. Very rarely do I find one of those pleasant old-world gardens where they still keep up the game. Instead, I see nothing but flat, blatant terraces on which a number of bash-ballers are exercising themselves in cages and being photographed for the daily Press.

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From the dry, baked soil they all spring prodigious distances in the air. Some people tell me that the photographers take their photographs close to the ground so as to increase the apparent height of these leaps. But I am inclined to think that bash-ballers practise the art of levitation, or else are suspended by springs from the ceiling. Pat-ballers, as I said before, simply imitate them, only they cannot jump so high yet, or brandish their flails with such startling ferocity.

One of the marks of the true bash-baller is that he or she is entirely clothed in white. In the old days there used to be a pleasing variety of costume. Aunt Isabel simply changed her boots for a pair of speckled sandshoes, and I have seen grey flannels contending with coloured blouses in a garden where the County called. To-day, they tell me, white sock-suspenders are practically *de rigueur* in Hoxton.

. . . There are just one or two places, however, at Bittleigh where it is still possible to play lawn-tennis. At Firleigh Hall, for instance, there is a gentle swell about the court, and one frequently hits the ball through the side-nets into the long grass of the paddock. The house is full of ingle-nooks and dogs and fishing-rods and guns, and no pretence is made that a man

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is valued for his service alone. To return to the lawn. There is always a tame magpie hopping about on it, which when one is standing on the base line pecks the back of one's socks. This is in the true tradition of the game. I like Firleigh Hall.

15. Maybirds ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

I CAN see some justification for keeping peacocks, as they do at Soping Hall, which stands high up in the forest where the yaffles laugh and the woodcutters are always at work. Peacocks at any rate are beautiful. They go well, for instance, with sundials, though as a matter of fact sundials are a nuisance nowadays, owing to the trouble of having them reset for summer and winter time.

But I can see no justification whatever for keeping maybirds, which have neither beauty nor use. Perhaps you do not know what a maybird is. I have five maybirds. I have them because people here would keep saying to me, "Look at the price of fresh eggs, and how much nicer it is to have your own." It is a curious thing about the country that people are always giving one disinterested advice in the matter of economy. In London it is different. In London people let you take a twopenny bus ticket to Westminster instead of walking across the Park and go to ruin in your own sweet way. They rather admire

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your dash. But in the country they tell you about these things.

So I went to a man and confessed to him my trouble about fresh eggs.

"I see," he said ; "you want maybirds."

"No, I don't," I said, "I want hens."

"It's the same thing," he told me. "How many would you like ?"

"Five," I said. I thought five would be an unostentatious number and make it clear that I was not trying to compete with the wholesale egg-dealers.

He segregated five maybirds and explained their points to me.

It appeared that one of them was a Buff Orpington, and three were White Wyandottes, and one had no particular politics. I should say, now, that it was an Independent. It has speckles and is the one that keeps getting into the garden.

I asked him when the creatures would begin to enter upon their new duties, and he said they would do so at once.

"What is their maximum egg-laying velocity ?" I inquired.

"They lay about three eggs a day, between them," he said, "these five birds."

"Why between them ?" I asked. But I consented to buy his birds, and he said if I liked

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he would run round to my garden at once and run up a hen-house and a hen-run for me. "Run" seemed rather a word with him.

I said, "Yes, by all means."

He came round that evening and hewed down an apple-tree under the light of the moon to make room for the maybird run, and in the morning he brought a large roll of wire netting, and the next day he built a wooden house, and the day after that he came round and asked for some cinders. He sprinkled these all over the enclosure, and I watched him while he worked.

"They want something to scratch in when they run about," he explained. "Exercise is what they need."

"They seem to be scratching already, but they don't seem to be running," I said. "Wouldn't it have been better to put a cinder-track all round the edge and train them to run races round it?"

He said he hadn't thought of that, but I could try if I liked. Then he gave me a bag of food, which he said was particularly efficacious for maybirds, and produced his bill.

All this happened about a month ago, and for the last four weeks the principal preoccupation of my household has been the feeding of these five birds. I have had to lay a gravel-

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path from the aviary to the back premises in order to sustain the weight of the traffic. Huge bowls of hot food are constantly being mixed and carried to them, without any apparent consciousness on their part of their reciprocal responsibilities. What I mean to say is that there are no eggs. The food which they eat resembles Christmas pudding at the time when it is stirred, and I have suggested that a sixpence should be concealed in it every now and then—sixpence being apparently the current price of an egg—in order to indicate the nature of our hopes.

I have made other valuable suggestions. I have suggested putting an anthracite stove in their sitting-room, and papering the walls with illustrations representing various methods of mass production, ordinary methods having failed. I notice that cabbages are suspended by a string across the top of the parade ground in order that the birds may obtain exercise by springing at them. The cabbages are eaten, but I do not believe that the birds jump. I believe that they clamber up the wire with their claws, walk along the tight-rope, and bite off the cabbage with their teeth.

Sometimes, as I think I have mentioned, the one with speckles escapes into the garden, and I have several times been asked to chase it

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home. Nothing makes one look more ridiculous than chasing an Independent maybird of no particular views across an onion bed. The rest of the animals appear to spend most of their time in walking about the run, with their hands in their pockets, looking for things on the ground.

But every now and then one or other of them makes the loud cry which is usually associated with successful egg-production; the whole household troops, beaming with anticipation, along the gravel path; and it is then discovered that the Buff has knocked one of the Whites off her perch, or that one of the Whites has scratched a cinder on which the Buff had set her eye, or that the Independent member has made a bitter speech which is deeply resented by the Government perches. But there are no eggs.

About a week ago the corn, which apparently forms a part of the necessary nourishment of maybirds, and is kept in an outhouse, was attacked by rats. I was told that I must do something about this. I was very busy at the time drawing a rough map of the Hammer Ponds for my book, but I buttered some slices of bread with arsenic and laid them down on the outhouse floor. The rats ate the bread and arsenic and went on with the corn.

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Unless a great improvement is manifested in the New Year, I have decided to butter the maybirds with arsenic, and place them in the outhouse too.

16. The Gusher ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

FOR some reason or other, as the years roll by, I find that I have an increasing disinclination to make my fortune in oil. I do not keep my eye on oil. Even when I am told to keep my i on oil, or when by a still bolder flight of fancy a picture of the human orb of vision is inserted instead of the word or letter, I still stand aloof.

Admittedly the thing is a speculation ; but what a fascinating speculation it is. For the small outlay of five pounds, writes my old friend, Harry P. Chugg, I have an unequalled opportunity of making a very large profit or securing a regular Income for Life. This is not possible, points out Harry P. Chugg, with a strange forgetfulness of the Calcutta Sweep-stake, in any other form of speculation except oil. Still you cannot expect Harry P. Chugg to remember everything. He has been pretty busy lately, has Harry P. Chugg, what with one thing and another. Saying good-bye, for instance, to " Our Geologist," who, I notice, is already on the field. . . .

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The timid investor might be disposed to fancy that a previous knowledge of oil or his own presence on the field would secure him some kind of advantage. But that is not really so. The great oil game is no longer the monopoly of big companies. It is in the hands of the individual, and, owing to the benefits of the Mutual Co-operative Scheme to which Harry P. Chugg draws my attention, the individual need no longer be the individual on the spot. As soon as the Five-pound Mutual Co-operative Scheme is completed, locating and drilling operations will be undertaken by experts of well-known reputation—not at the expense of the Mutual Co-operators, of course, but at the expense of the Company which has drawn up this benevolent scheme on their behalf. Harry P. Chugg is the secretary of this Company. That is why he wants to explain to me the generosity of the Mutual Co-operative Scheme. He also sends me a form to fill in to accompany my remittance of five pounds. I can even send fifty pounds if I like. I can even have Ten Oil Plots—but not more. Harry P. Chugg is very strict about that. Where would the other Mutual Co-operators come in if I tried to wolf the whole field?

One must remember that in this matter of oil—Arkansas oil, I mean—it is early days as

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yet. Only a year odd has elapsed since the great Busey gusher burst and gave the entire city of Eldorado an oil bath, and they have not got the oil off the principal buildings to-day. Astonishing successes are still being made, irrespective of social station, sex, or the colour of the investor's skin.

Princess Allie Daney, for instance, of the Choctaw tribe of American Red Indians, is very beautiful and only nineteen. She has had three husbands. To marry the first of these she eloped from a convent at fourteen. She now lives in the "Choctaw Palace" in Muskogee. A few years ago Princess Allie was only a little papoose on the Choctaw Indian reservation at Oklahoma. But oil was discovered there, and she, like hundreds of other Indians, became rich overnight. So Harry P. Chugg says.

Of course when I was only a little papoose I did not live on the Choctaw Indian reservation at Oklahoma. I lived in an ordinary English town. All the same, I suppose that I might acquire a Five-pound oil-plot under the Mutual Co-operative Scheme, and eventually own several motor-cars. But I doubt whether I shall ever be very beautiful and only nineteen again.

Nor do I feel disposed to build too much

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upon the experience of C. R. Coble, aged twenty-eight, who has been a resident of Little Rock for the past year. He frankly admits that he knows "practically nothing about the oil game." His "luck," as he calls it, is in striking a thirty-five-thousand-barrel-a-day oil gusher, known as No. 1, Vitex Stringfellow, in Snackover Territory, Arkansas. Mr. Coble takes his sudden acquisition of wealth with a calm that is almost indecent.

I doubt whether I should do that. But should I have C. R. Coble's "luck," as he calls it? I wonder. Mr. C. R. Coble, I notice, was a native of Indianapolis to begin with. And he started early; he is only twenty-eight to-day—a mere papoose, despite his indecent calm. There is some kind of affinity, I feel, between youth and oil.

Don't let anything that I have said deter you from securing your oil-plot to-day and making a fortune out of it. Don't let the "publicity thrust upon Harry F. Sinclair, a business man," as Harry P. Chugg so justly says, "of the old romantic type," prevent you from having anything to do with oil.

The very picture of Amerigo di Vespucci, surrounded by a faithful band of his armed followers, which adorns the Prospectus, with a photograph of twelve oil-gushers inset, should

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convince you that you ought to keep your i
upon oil.

I am only too happy to pass the opportunity on. The sole reason that I do not wish to take advantage of it for myself is that I have an oil-plot already. I bought it twelve years ago, and it would seem like a lack of confidence in it if I acquired another before this one began to gush.

17. The Filming of Poetry ∞ ∞

A GOOD many steps have been taken towards the filming of history, but in the filming of poetry very little progress has been made. Mr. John Masefield's "Daffodil Field" has, however, been screened. I can see no reason why all Mr. Masefield's poems should not be subjected to a similar treatment. Take, for instance, his "Sea Fever"—the lines beginning

I must go down to the sea again.

I reckon that, properly handled, the three stanzas of this simple poem should play for about forty or forty-five minutes. We shall begin by presenting, let us say, Roy Harrison, tapioca expert, at work in his office. Roy is worried. You can tell that he is worried because it says so in a sub-title, and because he looks worried in the picture, and still more worried in the special large picture of his face worrying. People keep coming in. Brisk business men. They do not take their hats off. That does not worry Roy Harrison, because

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film-men in offices never do take their hats off. They are frightened of the draught. The trouble is that the tapioca business is going from bad to worse. Roy throws papers about and curses his stenographer. She flounces out. The telephone-bell rings. You can tell that the bell has rung because of the fearful start that Roy gives before he picks up the receiver. That is the way of business men. There is bad news. Wire-worm is ravaging the tapioca fields (picture here), and an official *communiqué* is flashed on the screen :

*The public is warned against eating tapioca
pudding until further notice.*

This is dreadful for Roy, because he is either bulling or wolfing tapioca. I forget which, probably both. He becomes desperate. He pushes his fingers through his hair, looks haggard, lights a cigarette (failing with the first two matches), rises and walks about the room. Suddenly he sees a small picture on the wall. The picture, enlarged, is flashed upon the screen. It is a seascape. Memories, visions of seascapes throng through Roy Harrison's brain. You see them thronging. Himself on the deck of a liner, himself fishing off the pier at Southend, himself rounding

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Cape Horn in a coaster, himself harpooning a whale. Roy Harrison now knows what he wants. His face lights up. He smiles. He brings his fist crashing down on the table.

I must go down to the sea again.

It is, in fact, the Wanderlust. Confound tapioca !

The lonely sea and the sky.

In filming the lonely sea and the sky it is better to have the former fairly rough and the latter overcast. Heaving billows—a mass of rolling clouds. Birds will wing their way across these. Ducks. Teal. Bitterns. Wild geese. The bitterns boom. The wild geese honk. Honking and booming are done by the orchestra.

Roy now snatches the telephone book from the table and turns over the pages, licking his thumb. He finds a firm of shipowners. But before taking any further steps he gazes with a look of ecstasy at the audience, and you see his lower jaw bone saying quite clearly :

The lonely sea and the sky.

After that he feels sufficiently nerved to

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tackle the telephone again. He rings up the shipowners and orders a tall ship. It must be tall.

And all I ask is a tall ship.

You see him shouting the words " Tall ! Tall ! " into the receiver.

And now we have a sight of which the eyes of picture-goers never tire, although it is interminably repeated in film after film. It is a sight that you never see on the stage and its fascination is irresistible. Roy Harrison walks down the steps of his office and out into the street. A motor-car is waiting at the kerb. The chauffeur is standing beside the car. He opens the door of the car. Roy Harrison steps in. " Docks ! " he says. The chauffeur shuts the door. The chauffeur mounts his seat and the car starts. It is a self-starter. It dashes rapidly down the street. It dashes rapidly up another. It dashes through street after street. It arrives at the docks. It is the same car, and has the same Roy Harrison inside it. There is no deception at all. He has travelled from his office to the docks in his own motor-car, driven by his own chauffeur. There is no break in the action. You cannot get this kind of thing anywhere but on the screen.

You will now begin to have a pretty good

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idea of the way in which the film will interpret and intensify the beauty of the poem. I need not tell you the rest in detail. How Roy Harrison finds his ship, the tallest ship there ; how he contemptuously declines the offer of a compass :

*And all I ask is a tall ship -
And a star to steer her by ;*

how he is soon espied well out to sea under a sky in which is one large star (not more than one star is needed, but it must be large), holding tightly to the kicking wheel ; how he sees a whale—and a gull :

The gull's way and the whale's way ;

how he is wrecked on a desert island, where his one great rival in the tapioca trade happens to have been wrecked too ; how they fight together, not as bull to bull, but as man to man, with marline-spikes ; how the enemy is killed and Roy Harrison makes a raft of packing-cases and is picked up by a coal-tramp, on which he meets

Todd P. Lumley, " a laughing fellow-rover "
(STUART ALASTAIR).

who alone of all men has hit upon a secret

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invention for combating the ravages of wire-worm in tapioca ; how he returns from his trip—

*And the flung spray and the blown spume and the seagulls
crying—*

just in time to prevent his wife's running away with his partner ; knocks the partner down and takes Todd P. Lumley into the firm. These things I need not tell you. You will have guessed them.

Enough to say that we end with the picture of Roy Harrison taking a peaceful nap in his office-chair while Todd P. Lumley flirts with the stenographer. No more travel. No more wandering. No more toil.

*And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long
trek's over.*

NEXT WEEK

“THE CUTAWAY KID,”

FEATURING

BABS BUNCOMBE

18. The Queen of Nineveh ∞ ∞

(A leading article on a sensational picture-play. Quoted by kind permission from "The Times" of to-morrow week.)

WE are not ourselves greatly impressed by the objections which are being raised to the film entitled "The Queen of Nineveh" dealing with the story of JONAH and the Whale, and due, we believe, for simultaneous release at the National Gallery and the British Museum early in the spring.

The first of these objections comes from the R.S.P.C.A., whose secretary points out that the whale is a warm-blooded animal, and as such entitled to the respect and admiration of all lovers of wild things and their ways. To represent on the screen the internal tortures which such an animal must admittedly have suffered after the act of swallowing a live prophet is to encourage, so his argument goes, an attitude of indifference towards our dumb fellow-creatures.

To this we feel bound to reply that the

The Queen of Nineveh

opportunities for torturing a whale in such a manner, so far as the general public is concerned, are of necessity limited ; nor are we prepared to admit that the mere incitation to cruelty of a few keepers of private aquaria or persons engaged in the pursuit of Arctic blubber is a sufficient charge to bring against an attractive and, on the whole, a thoroughly reverent spectacle.

It will be frankly conceded by most of those present at the private exhibition that the face of the whale, showing at the first gulp signs of evident satisfaction and even winking with one eye at the audience, but rapidly changing to an expression of surprise, followed by alarm, discomfort, and poignant agony, is held too long upon the screen. But this part of the film can easily be shortened without damage to the production as a whole, and the moment of sudden revulsion, where the preacher is hurled violently out upon a desolate beach by the animal, provides one of the most remarkable maritime *frissons* we have been privileged to witness on the wordless stage.

A second group of objections comes from students of the Higher Criticism and scientists in general. It is complained, in the first place, that the whole conception of the swallowing of the Prophet is undoubtedly an allegorical

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interlude; old-world powers, such as Nineveh, being frequently referred to as dragons or sea-monsters, and returned voyagers being spoken of as rescued from the depths of the sea. It is urged, in the second place, that the whale shown in this film is unfortunately an Arctic right whale, and that a right whale, even if resident in Levantine waters, would not be capable of the deglutition, still less of the temporary assimilation, of a floating prophet, the throat in this species being particularly narrow, and the cavity of the mouth actually larger than that of the body, thorax, and abdomen combined. The vivid presentment, therefore, of the JONAH myth as a fact of ancient history would, according to this view, tend to a definitely reactionary outlook on Old Testament history, and at the same time to a false conception of anatomical truth.

To meet this criticism we would advance the suggestion that the modern cinema is quite capable of representing allegorical significance as opposed to historic fact. It could easily be done, for instance, by the screening of a few explanatory sentences such as the following :

*Meanwhile, struggling in the trough of
mighty waters, JONAH beholds a vision ;
Great jaws close over him ;
He passes into the night.*

The Queen of Nineveh

Whilst the prejudices of science might be overcome by a further announcement of this kind :

Little knowing that the actual food of the balæna of his dream consists mainly of minute but highly nutritious crustaceans and pteropods, which it filters through a whalebone sieve.

This could be followed by a short exhibition of the feeding apparatus and, if it were felt to be really necessary, of the interior organs of the *mystacoceti*.

Of far more weight is the charge brought by a number of prominent Churchmen of various denominations against the introduction of a fictitious love interest into the well-known Scriptural narrative. The beautiful scene in the garden at Joppa, where the ten-year-old JONAH is presented by the young Ninevite princess with an ivory charm and, raising it to his lips, says, " I shall never forget my little Assyrian girl-friend," and she replies, " Nor I my little Hebrew boy-knight," has certainly no kind of Biblical authority. Nor has the later episode, where the Princess, now grown to charming adolescence, comes down to the beach with her attendant maidens and sees her

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childhood's friend appear before her, dishevelled but heroically calm of face, after his sudden ejection by the Titan of the deep.

Whether or no this intrusion of the romantic element is necessary to satisfy the taste of the picture-going public we cannot pretend to say, but, if necessary, it is surely over-emphasized. There is no artistic merit in making the amulet given to JONAH by the Princess, which is apparently in the form of a brooch with a long pin, the actual means by which he secures his liberation from the irritated monster. Nor do we think it likely that a ruler so proud and despotic as the monarchs of Nineveh presumably were would join on his death-bed the hand of his only daughter with that of an adventurer (however seasoned by travel and however devout) belonging to a little principality like Israel.

These things, however, are but small blemishes in a noteworthy and magnificently produced film, which marks another epoch in the annals of the British cinematograph. And we would counsel cavillers to observe that a far higher standard of modesty obtains in this play than in many of its contemporaries and predecessors. The Princess herself is on every occasion adequately attired, and, violent though the

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ordeal is through which the Prophet passes to escape from his strange captivity, no portion of his clothing is retained by the fish.

19. What I Can Do ~ ~ ~

WITH the threat of a general strike hanging over our heads it behoves us all to take stock of ourselves and consider our deficiencies on the one hand and our qualifications on the other. For some time I have been asking myself, "What can I do?" and the answers I get are a little unsatisfactory.

I cannot milk a cow. No doubt it would be a good thing to go round to somebody who has cows and ask him to lend me one of them for the afternoon to practise with; preferably one without horns or a tail. Will somebody oblige me with a cow?

Once the milk has been got I am on surer ground, for I know how to carry a can of milk and place it beside an area door; but that done I am instantly faced with another difficulty.

I do not know how to produce the noise which milkmen make when they supply a can of milk. Many members of West End clubs in the face of this emergency have been practising it for hours in vain. That noise would

What I Can Do

have to be learnt, and learnt from a good elocutionist too.

I cannot hew coal. I should imagine, however, that if the general strike comes we shall not make much attempt to get coal. But I can hew wood and saw it into pieces for the fire. The great thing to remember is to ask the carpenter to set the saw first. After that all you have to do is to make the two cuts meet. If you don't you have to bang the log upon the ground until the piece comes off. For some reason or other I hold my breath all the time I am sawing, as I do when I am going to make a stroke at golf. I also put my tongue out, which I never do at golf.

I cannot do things to the things which work electrical things. I know many people who can, and I admire them for it. When the general strike comes I shall ask not to be put at the electric light dépôt. It may seem a cowardly request but it will benefit the country in the end.

I can drive a motor-car, with encouragement, and perhaps I could drive a steam-engine ; but I think on the whole it would be better if I were one of those men who go round and hit the axles of the wheels with a hammer before the train starts, or who collect the newspapers and pearl necklaces when it stops.

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I can poke letters through the slits of front-doors, unless the metal flap is very stiff. I do not know whether in the event of a general strike the postmen would come out, but if they do I shall welcome the opportunity of showing my skill. I shall make a special point of not delivering any of the letters for Maurice Biggs, Dorothy Saunders, and Henry Gunn, which usually come to this house. Maurice Biggs, Dorothy Saunders, and Henry Gunn do not live in this house. There must have been a time when they did so, but that time is now long past. If it needs a general strike of Labour to call the attention of the G.P.O. to this fact, something at least will have been achieved. I shall try to set the Intelligence Department of the G.P.O. at work to discover the present addresses of Maurice Biggs, Dorothy Saunders, and Henry Gunn.

I do not understand what goes on below the gratings that one sees here and there about the streets. I do not find that any of my friends can tell me much about them. When the strike comes, therefore, I submit, with due deference to the authorities, that we allow these things to stay as they are. There is a good proverb which says, "Let sleeping dogs lie," and I have often heard people apply it to the insides of their motor-cars. I think we should

What I Can Do

do well not to interfere with those mysterious trap-doors and orifices in the street until industrial peace has been once more secured. From what I have seen of the interior of these places when they happen to be open, I have formed the conclusion that it would be contrary to the nation's interest and the public weal to probe too deeply into the secrets they contain.

And whilst we are about it I should like to suggest that we do not depute any portion of our army of volunteers to pull up the London roads. It seems to me that the most regularly employed of the striking-men of this country are constantly engaged in preventing the traffic of London from getting from one place to another. I do not know if I could pull up a road, but I expect I could if I was not the man who holds the pin. But my idea of a road is that it ought to be a surface over which wheeled vehicles move rapidly to and fro upon their lawful occasions, and not a kind of quarry from which to extract cement and clay. I realize that there is no more popular exhibition in London than the smashing-up of a road, especially when it is done by a forty-thousand horsepower dentist's drill. But in a grave national crisis I think we ought to dispense with this kind of joy.

I cannot dig. Or rather I can, but not for

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long. After digging for a short while a feeling comes over me that the value of the kindly fruits of the earth has been vastly exaggerated. What, after all, does a man want with vegetables (wasn't it Beau Brummel who was asked if he ever ate them, and said he believed that he had once tasted a pea ?) when he can get meat and wine and bread ? But speaking of bread reminds me of another awkward thing.

I cannot bake. I tried to bake a loaf once, but there was some slight technical error. The stuff was of the consistency of india-rubber, but had the additional drawback that it would not rub anything out. I shall ask not to be lined up in the baking squad, unless there is a dearth in the motor trade of solid rubber tyres.

But I can cook bacon and eggs. I can cook them better than any cook I know. It is a knack, I admit, that little action of the wrist which breaks the egg exactly in the right manner and does not spill it on the floor ; and a very nice judgment is needed in turning over the rashers. But (I say it without pride) I can do these things.

The production of the eggs and bacon is another and more difficult affair. I have, I think, on a former occasion alluded to the expense and labour involved in tempting a hen

What I Can Do

to lay an egg, and I prefer to leave this delicate work to psycho-analysts and dietetic experts ; nor have I the faintest idea how to induce a hog to lay bacon. It looks, on the whole, as if more of my time will be spent in this case over the manufacture of the finished product than in the cultivation and supply of the raw material.

I cannot weave or spin. Few of my acquaintances have this gift. The number of wheels and spindles confuses my mind, and the noise of the apparatus is bad for my nerves. When I contemplate ridiculous machinery of this kind I can only marvel that men, and quite frequently women, wear clothes.

I cherish the belief that with a little practice I could learn to operate a telephone exchange, assuming, of course, as in the case of postmen, that telephone operators, when the general strike comes, lay down their novelettes. The most important point is to remember to ask the number required by the subscriber in a loud, clear voice before going on with the story. After this formality one finishes the chapter and says, "Have they answered yet?" and, on receiving the reply "No," utters the words, "I'll ring them again; will you repeat the number, please?" as if one had really tried to get the number the first time. A few

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minutes after that, if the story is at all exciting, one says, "Sorry; the number's engaged."

At least that is how I understand the thing. I may be wrong, but if I am right it is the kind of work I should soon be at home with, and in a few days, I expect, really get to enjoy.

I can work a tube lift. But by the Lord Harry I won't!

I can black boots rather well, and I can brown them excellently if the leather is good.

I cannot fill up Schedule D.

20. A Note Upon Dialect ♪ ♪

THEY have just finished laying a carpet on the stairs. Two of the people who were living in Bittleigh before William the Conqueror came and laid it. They interrupted me just as I was beginning my book on Sussex iron, and I came out of my study to watch them. They rucked up the carpet rather badly in putting it round the corner, and I overheard one of them say to the other, "You've got it all bumblesome-like." Bumblesome means just that—rucked up. What else could a word like bumblesome mean?

I have been reading the book of a man who made a special study of Sussex speech all his life, and I have come to the conclusion that the only happy people in England are the people who still have dialect to comfort them. For the words that country folk use do really fit the situations they are meant for. They fit them like a glove. And when you have said a thing that really fits the situation it is balm and ointment to the soul.

Supposing that you have gone to London

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and suffered a really terrible journey on the Underground Railway. You can swear about it, of course, or you can be funny about it, but neither of these things will satisfy you. What you honestly need is to say something like this :

“The train was so pithered and cluttered up wi’ folk that I began to about skrow ; lady caught me a middlin’ bunt in the nod wi’ umberella, and now I’m that beazled I ain’t fit for naun but to lie down.”

After that you would feel better.

All the roads and the ride through the birch woods are muddy to-day. Mud is a good word ; but it does not really express what you have on your boots. Ours is a whitish kind of mud, but in Sussex there is black mud too. Black mud is called “gubber.” And what else but gubber could you call black mud and feel that you had done your duty by it ?

In Sussex, to be angry and surly is to swork. The appearance of clouds before a thunderstorm is swallocky ; and to walk with downcast head is to snudge. As soon as a man has heard these words once he recognizes them. They come back to him out of his subliminal self. They are good words, and they ought to be re-introduced into society. They ought to be used in political debates. They would lend,

A Note Upon Dialect

I think, a much-needed tone of emphasis to the deliberations of the House of Commons. I should like to read in the papers that a Member of Parliament had got up and said : “ With all due respect to the explanation which the right honourable gentleman has just seen fit to give, I feel compelled to reiterate my opinion that the Government has bungered this Finance Bill to rights and made a hem bad boffle.” Or “ Considering the deplorable financial outlook by which the country is faced at the moment, I should be betraying the confidence which my constituents have reposed in me if I failed to state that I never did see such a tedious out deway larmentubble poor Budget in all my borns ! ”

Or at those dark moments when angry passions seethe and insults are hurled, I should like to read something like this :

Mr. Blank (suddenly to *Mr. Dash*) : You nasty, brabagious creature !

The Friend of Mr. Dash (to the Speaker) : Is the honourable and gallant Member for Gubber in order in using the word “ brabagious ” ?

The Speaker : I have no idea what “ brabagious ” means.

Mr. Dash (now thoroughly roused, and glaring fiercely at *Mr. Blank*) : You slummocky chog !

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A chog is a refuse cutting of the hop-plant when dressed in spring before being polled. I don't see how Mr. Blank could find any reply to that.

21. Cousin Frederick ♪ ♪ ♪

PERSIA. He had come back from Persia. I began to think about it. A pink—or was it purple?—rhomboid on the map, a source of political trouble in the present and in the past, the home of Cyrus and Darius and the parasang, the export mart for many-hued rugs and the overcoat collars and M.P.'s. Also oil. But over and beyond these things the tinkling of fountains, veiled beauties, the music of bulbuls, gardens beneath the moon. Romance. Yet somehow nothing precise, nothing definite. I was very glad therefore that my cousin Frederick, who had just come back from Persia, was to visit us. He should make Persia live.

Whenever a relative of mine comes back from a far-away place like Cochin-China, for instance, or Ceylon, I feel like this. But there is a difficulty. I don't care to confess that I have made no serious mental effort to keep in touch with Cochin-China or Ceylon since I left the Lower Fifth. It argues a kind of remissness on my part. I don't like to make a perfectly

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obvious remark about these places, such as "I suppose it takes a long time to get used to the size of the hens in Cochin-China?" or, "I expect you must be missing the spice in the breezes now you have come home?" So I try ordinary noncommittal sorts of questions in the hope of drawing them out.

I felt this difficulty strongly about Persia. If we had happened to be living in the time of the Emperor Darius I believe that I could have got on quite well with a man who had just come back from Persia. There are one or two stories in Herodotus, for instance—rather smoking-room stories, now I come to think of it, but I don't suppose my cousin Frederick would have minded that. The laxness of the East, you know. With regard to social life in Persia since Artaxerxes my mind was a bit misty. There was Omar Khayyám, of course. And Scheherazade. But was that Persia or Bagdad? And Flecker's "Hassan." But, hang it all, that was Bagdad too. One must not confuse Persia with Mesopotamia. I seemed to have lost my sense of the Persian atmosphere for the last thousand years or so.

I was just walking across to get "Orn-Pht" out of the bottom shelf of the bookcase when my cousin Frederick arrived. He did not look

Cousin Frederick

as if he had been romanticized very much by his three and a half years in Persia. He was not fierce-looking or lean. He was brown, but then he had always been that.

“ Well,” I said, “ and how are you ? Did you come up by Tube ? ”

Rather a bad opening that, really, I think. As if there was a Tube to Persia. But we always ask people who come to this house whether they came up by Tube. I think it is so that we can go on to tell them that they could have come by bus if they had gone a different way and walked a little farther. This starts the ball rolling. It appeared, however, that my cousin Frederick had driven himself up in a motor-car. We went out together to look at it, and he told me things about it, and the reasons why he had bought it in preference to a great number of other cars. I felt at once that we were rather getting away from the glamour of the East.

“ I suppose you don't have a car out there ? ” I said, trying to draw him back, and wondering what he did have. I did not quite like to suggest camels.

“ Oh, yes, I do ; I have a Ford out there,” he replied.

“ Oh ! ” I said. I always say “ Oh ! ” just like that, when anyone tells me he has a Ford.

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It seems to me to be the only tactful thing to say.

"Do you have to motor much in Basra?" I went on sympathetically.

"Well, I wasn't in Basra, you know. I was in Bushire."

"Of course, how frightfully stupid of me. I always mix those two words up," I murmured, as if I spent almost the whole day talking about Basra and Bushire and attempting to keep them distinct. "Pretty hot out there, I should imagine?"

"It's hot in the hot weather," he admitted, rather grudgingly, I thought, "and cold in the cold."

"I suppose you wear thinner things in the hot weather?"

"We wear thinner things in the summer and thicker things in the winter," he agreed.

I attempted, without success, to visualize the mysterious East.

"Did you get much sport?" I asked rather brilliantly as we went indoors again.

"Not bad," he said. "Snipe and duck."

"Oh, snipe and duck!" I exclaimed, trying to seem excited. As a matter of fact I had been expecting flamingos or yak.

"What about a whisky-and-soda?" I suggested, concealing my chagrin.

Cousin Frederick

"Very nice," replied my cousin Frederick.

"Do people drink much in Bas—Bushire?" I asked, holding up the glass and looking closely at it when he had said when.

"A fair amount," he said. "Soda up to the top, please, for me."

"Not the natives, I suppose?" I hazarded. I had a kind of hazy recollection that the natives of Persia were Mohammedans, and live upon sherbet and rice.

"Not officially," replied Frederick. "But they mop up a good deal on the quiet whenever they get a chance."

It did not seem to me that this pointed to a remarkable difference between the psychology of the Persian and the Anglo-Saxon peoples. But I said nothing.

"And when do you go back?" I asked him, after a pause. It was rather early to ask that, of course, but Frederick had the air of one who has discussed Persia and its problems pretty thoroughly.

"In October. But I shan't be at Bushire then. I'm going up to Shiraz."

"Shiraz," I thrilled. The word opened new vistas. One could not help feeling romantic about Shiraz.

"Surely," I said, "there are roses there."

"Fruit, too," he replied. "You can make

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jolly good cherry brandy, I believe, at Shiraz."

"And is it far from Bushire?"

"About a hundred miles as the crow flies," he said. "But you have to go over a couple of mountain ranges to get there."

"What on?"

"Mules."

"And is there good shooting there, too?"

"Very."

"What kind?" I asked hopefully.

"Snipe and duck," he said, "but more of it."

I gave up Shiraz and went back over the mountains to Bushire. I had had a sudden, brilliant idea.

"Have you brought back any photographs?" I asked.

"One or two," he said, taking out a pocket-case and handing me three. I looked at the first. It was a photograph of a black dog sitting on a chair.

"A setter," I said.

"Part spaniel and part setter."

I looked at the second photograph. It was a photograph of two black dogs sitting on two chairs. The third was another photograph of the first dog, sitting on the same chair.

"Do you play any games in Persia?" I inquired.

Cousin Frederick

“Tennis,” he answered, “almost every evening.”

“On grass ? ”

“Mud.”

I made another rapid mental survey of the glories of Iran.

“And what do they give you to eat ? ” I asked.

“Oh, mutton, and chicken, and things out of tins.”

I felt that my cousin Frederick was not treating me quite fairly.

“Tell me about the natives,” I said. “What kind of people are they ? ”

“Some of them are very good fellows indeed,” he explained, “and some of them are rather swine.”

“What sort of chap is the Shah ? ” I went on. I was a little doubtful whether there was a Shah in Persia still. I thought there might be a Soviet. But it seemed to be all right.

“Oh, so-so,” said my cousin Frederick.

I checked myself on the point of asking how many wives the Shah had. I felt quite certain what Frederick would have replied. He would have said, “A fairish lot.” I thought of something else.

“Do you see much of the Shah ? ” I said.

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“ Well, you see, he’s always in Paris,” said Frederick.

I dismissed the Shah. I had thought of another thing.

“ I want you, Frederick,” I said, “ to come and look at our Persian rug.”

“ Yes ? ” he said, looking at it. He did not seem very enthusiastic.

“ It comes from Bokhara,” I continued. “ We think it is very old.”

“ Did it cost you much ? ” he inquired.

“ Yes,” I said. “ Isn’t it very old ? ”

“ No, it isn’t,” replied Frederick. “ Old Persian rugs don’t fade. That’s the beauty of them. Only modern ones fade. The Persians rub them with lime to make the colours dim, because the English and Americans like them to look old. That’s all.”

“ Thank you, Frederick,” I said, bowing my head low before the blast. “ What about another whisky-and-soda ? ”

“ Very nice indeed,” said my cousin Frederick. I decided not to ask him about the bulbuls at all.

22. Why I Bought A——Car

I DIDN'T mean to. It was the first stand I went up to really, and the young man asked me if I was interested at all, and I said that I was.

I knew quite well that he intended to talk to me about the engine, but I didn't want him to do that, partly because I don't know very much about engines and partly because I had found out from advertisements and things that his engine was much better than any of the other engines at the same price in the show. So I asked him whether he thought the driving seat would be comfortable for me, and he said, " Won't you get in and try it ? "

So I got in and sat down and pulled the brakes about and pressed the clutch, just as all the other people were doing, some of them because they were interested and some of them, I fancy, because they were so tired of standing up and walking round and round. But there's a limit, I think, to the time that one can spend standing on a accelerator when there's no life and bustle, so to speak, going on underneath the bonnet.

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So after a little while I got out and wondered what to say next.

As a matter of fact there were all sorts of things that I should have liked to tell the young man, if only I had known him well enough and had dared to do it. He was a nice-looking young man, wearing an old public-school tie. I should have liked to tell him about a friend of mine who has one of his cars—not this year's, but last year's model, of course—and who ran into a grammar school the other day. I tried to imagine the conversation if I did begin to tell him that little tale :

I : A friend of mine has one of these cars, and he ran into a grammar school last week.

He (very coldly) : And what grammar school was that, pray ?

I (hastily reassuring him) : Oh, quite a good one. A very old foundation. Edward VI, I believe. He ran into it just on the right-hand side of the gateway and crumpled up his mud-guard. One of the assistant-masters came out and saw him, but he was quite nice about it. He said they had always tried to make the entrance as difficult as they could. . . .

No, I didn't feel I could possibly bother the young man about that.

And then there is another friend of mine who has one of his cars but can never make it start

Why I bought A——Car

in the morning, either because the garage is too damp or else because he doesn't use thin enough oil, or else because life is just like that. He ties the bonnet all round with coats and blankets and rugs, and puts a miner's lamp inside, and runs the engine for an hour before he goes to bed. But when he gets up in the morning he has to turn the handle so long that he feels like an organ-grinder instead of a business man, and quite often the whole family has to collect and push him out of the garage and away down the hill, so that he can earn their daily bread.

But I didn't care to tell the young man that either.

And then there is our dog. There was no place in his car that I could see to which we could fasten our dog. We have tried fastening him to the door-handle in the car we have got now. Once he jumped out and dangled by the collar on the lead. It was a terrible moment before we got him in again. There ought to be a staple fixed in the middle of the floor of a little car to which one can fasten the lead of the dog.

And then, of course, there is Aunt Caroline. I don't mean that Aunt Caroline ever jumped out and dangled ; the trouble about her is her umbrella. She *will* take it with her, and it slips down on to the mat and tumbles out when

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the door is opened, and somebody treads on it. What is needed really in a little car is one of those basket arrangements at the side that they always used to have in governess-carts.

But I felt instinctively that the young man had far too technical and mechanical a mind to be interested in Aunt Caroline and the dog.

Nor did I like to say anything to him about books. Very often, when I go down into the country for week-ends, and have to write an article about "Autumn Solitude" or "Wild Geese in our Marshlands," I want to take one or two volumes of the "Encyclopædia" down with me for the sake of references. And a little car does not hold many volumes of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" with comfort and ease. If you had ever seen URA—ZYM bouncing over a really bumpy bit of road or on a small wayside bridge you would know what I mean. I should like to have asked him for how many volumes of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" the car was sprung, but I did not dare to do that.

I was afraid also to ask him whether the car went backwards very fast. I don't know how it is, but in the car we have now directly one uses the reverse gear, even though there is a steep up-hill behind, the thing leaps to the top as it were with one bound, like a chamois.

Why I bought A——Car

And I have seen other little cars behave in the same way. But the young man seemed to me to have too lofty a mind to enter into little troubles like this.

The fact is I simply didn't know *what* to say. So I looked at the dashboard very closely and said in rather a stern manner, "I notice your clock isn't going."

He admitted that, but said it could easily be wound up.

"How?" I inquired.

"By means of a little screw at the top," he said, indicating with the thumb and forefinger the method by which it was done.

"What," I said—"by hand?"

He confessed that it was so.

Then I went round to the other end of the car and bent down to look at the back axle. Before I got more than a brief glimpse my hat fell off. I crammed it hastily on my head and stood upright again. I fancied the young man looked rather amused about something, so I thought I would take him down a peg.

"It stands rather low, doesn't it?" I said. "Don't you think if it was standing by the pavement somebody might trip over it without noticing that it was there?"

He refused to admit this.

"I like the black stuff on the tyres," I said.

It Occurs To Me

“It gives the whole thing a very elegant appearance.”

After that I couldn't find anything else to say at all, so I said I would buy the car.

He said I could have one just like it delivered in two days.

“But I wanted to buy this one,” I explained.

“There's not the slightest difference,” he assured me. “We'll give you a trial run any time you like.”

“On my car,” I said, “or this?”

“Well, on a last year's model,” he said. “The running will be exactly the same.”

So of course I don't know anything whatsoever about my new ——. Nevertheless I have bought it, and I cannot help feeling what a merciful escape I have had from buying all the others as well. If I had gone even as far as the next stand I should most certainly have bought a ——.

23. The House-hunter



IT would be seen sometimes hovering shyly
on the fringes of a Sussex forest, only to
fade and reappear again at the corner of a hop-
field in Kent. It would be chased across the
flatlands and the marshes, it would be glimpsed
near Winchelsea or Hastings, pass onward to
the downs and plunge into the Channel with a
disappointing splash. Or again it would turn
northward, cross the Thames, and be pursued
with a harroo and a weylaway into Hertford-
shire, there for a moment sit like an eagle alit
in the light of its shining wings, then double
again and be lost until perhaps a rustling was
heard in the undergrowth of a spinney on the
boundary of Bucks and Berks. But that
vision also would die.

In wet wood and weary lane
Still we pant and pound in vain,
Still with leaden foot we chase
Waning pinion, fainting face.

Need I say that I am referring to Robinson's
country cottage ?

It Occurs To Me

It came to him in so many guises. Now it would have a Tudor air, and now it would be dressed in the garb of Queen Anne. Sometimes it would be merely modern, but Georgian or Elizabethan in style. Sometimes he built it for himself. Now and then, in moments of despair, it became nothing but a wooden bungalow, or, even worse, a whitewashed railway carriage, lying on the coast in one of those haphazard heaps of whitewashed railway carriages that look like an accident to an express train glossed over by the company and provided with water-butts. And then he would arouse himself from this evil dream and start advertising again.

I am referring, I say, to Robinson's country cottage.

Snared for a moment in exactly the position he desired, standing alone, with a fringe of trees and commanding an extensive and beautiful view, it would lack company's water and electric light. Cornered in an old-world village, it would be two miles stat., have inadequate offices, or only one sit. With every modern convenience it would be an eyesore, surrounded by ophthalmic troubles even more serious than itself. The presence of a bath-room would condemn it to dun-coloured brick. Modern sanitation appeared to necessitate

The House-hunter

rubble and pseudo-beams. He would quarter the ground, give a view-hallo and be over the hills again. He brought it to bay at last in the columns of "The East Ham Advertiser and Frittingly Gazette."

It didn't fulfil his dreams, of course, but it was fairly inoffensive. It stood on the side of a hill and had a view, if you looked carefully, of the downs. It has the advantage also of standing in its own grounds, which were fairly numerous if you reckoned them by the perch. It was made of red brick; and the windows did not seem to have been constructed by a malignant enemy of mankind. He wavered when he went to see it—wavered and was lost.

"It won't slip off, I suppose?" he said to the owner as they stood balancing themselves on the slope of the front lawn. "I've been chasing it now for so long."

The fellow did not understand. He merely coughed. Then he pointed out to Robinson with considerable pride the position of the sumph. After that he took him indoors.

"This is the dining-room, but we use it as a drawing-room," he said. And a few moments later, "This is really the kitchen, but we use it as a dining-room."

He opened the doors of another cupboard.

"This is really the scullery, but we use it as a

It Occurs To Me

kitchen, you see ; and that is the larder beyond."

"And what do you use the larder for ?" asked Robinson in some awe. "A billiard room ?"

The owner took him into the ex-kitchen again and pointed out the view.

"Beyond that dip in the downs," he said, "you can just see the sea."

They then went upstairs. In the largest of the three bedrooms the owner pointed at the view again.

"You can see more of the sea from here," he said.

"But it's the same sea, isn't it ?" asked Robinson cunningly.

He had him there. It was.

Several houses of a similar kind were strewn on the hill-side and appeared to lean over and look into the room. The owner observed the direction of Robinson's gaze.

"Very nice neighbours," he remarked anxiously.

"I'm sure they are," said Robinson cheerfully. "We shall be able to have very nice talks in the morning while we shave."

"I planted a tree down there," said the owner, pointing to a small leafless twig on the lawn, "which will absolutely prevent you from

The House-hunter

being overlooked on the south-south-east in a year or two."

"We can still sing to each other," said Robinson, "through the boughs. By the way, how far is it to the sea?"

"A mile by the path," said the owner, "but actually not more than three-quarters as the crow flies."

"I shall be using the path principally," said Robinson. "I suppose I shall be able to bathe when I get there, I mean without a tent or a hut?"

"Oh, yes," said the owner; "everybody does. Twenty or thirty at a time. Women and all."

"Oh, yes," said Robinson faintly. He was rather a shy man.

"There's not room for a garage," he suggested at last, with a faint stirring of hope, "if I ever wanted to make one."

"The easiest thing in the world," said the owner. "All you've got to do is to cut a hole into the side of the hill near the gate."

"Of course," said Robinson nervously, fingering his pocket-knife. "I forgot the side of the hill."

"What's more," went on the owner, "you could easily add on two more rooms, if you liked, on the west side."

It Occurs To Me

“Without interfering,” inquired Robinson innocently, “with the library sink? By the way, is there anything I ought to know about the tenure of the land? Anything I mayn’t do?”

“Nothing important,” said the owner. “You mayn’t open a shop, and you mayn’t take in more than a reasonable number of good-class paying guests.”

“That is rather hard,” said Robinson. “I had rather thought of making it a kind of rural substitute for Pelfridges and the Parkleigh Hotel. With nice neighbours, of course,” he went on gracefully, “and graduated views of the sea.”

All the same, he bought it, signed the agreement, paid a deposit, accepted a drink. As I said, there was nothing really offensive about the place. He wanted a cottage. This one had no vice.

And then, going back to the station, remorse assailed him. Gone the happy days of hunting, when every strip of wood held glimpses of the ideal, every opening hollow of the downs might reveal the shape of the beloved. Gone the joy of the chase, the hope, the frenzy of the gallop through “The Times.”

The car stopped at the station.

Mechanically Robinson looked at the building

The House-hunter

on the opposite side of the road. It said, in very large letters :

THE OFFICES OF THE "EAST HAM
ADVERTISER AND FRITTINGLY
GAZETTE."

"After all, why not ?" he thought, and went inside.

"I want to advertise a cottage for sale," he said. "Steepside, it's called."

"We have an advertisement about Steepside already, I think," they told him.

"I know," said Robinson ; "I want you to keep it on in my name."

24. Why I am a Bad Correspondent ♪

I DEPRECATE the unpleasant adjective. Say rather acutely sensitive. Temperamental if you will. Say that I value the niceties of language and thought.

There is a kind of person who will sit down and compose an answer to a family letter directly it has been received, and apparently derive a sort of smug self-righteous satisfaction from the barbarous act. This is the sort of person who is always saying to me, "I am simply sick of seeing that letter from your Uncle Richard lying about on your study table. I do wish you'd answer it now and get it done with for good."

As if words have no meaning whatever, as if letter-writing were not an art. The position with regard to my Uncle Richard's letter is that it will receive a satisfactory answer in the fullness of time, when the mood is upon me, when the hour is ripe. It is a letter of a peculiarly annoying and difficult type, and whatever answer I give to it involves, so far as I can see, some subsequent action of a

Why I am a Bad Correspondent

fatiguing nature on my part; it demands the utmost care.

The greatest mistake in the world is to suppose that my delay in answering letters is the result of any physical laziness or undue tendency to procrastinate. Granted that considerable manual labour is involved in the process of assembling and bringing into concerted action the various parts of the following apparatus :

The pen.

The ink.

The paper.

The envelope.

The hidden blotting-paper.

The profiteering stamp.

The desk.

The uncomfortable chair.

The almanack.

The mucilage moistener.

And (in the case of my Uncle Richard)

The telephone-book

in order to find out whether they made him a Major or, almost unthinkably, a Colonel before he retired.

None the less I am not the man to be daunted by technical difficulties such as these when I have once made up my mind on the exact *nuance* of the phrases which will eventually

It Occurs To Me

comprise my reply to Uncle Richard and their probable reactions upon his conscious and subconscious mind.

I will confess at this point that there have been occasions when the difficulty of collecting and arranging material for correspondence has baffled me for a longer period than I should have supposed. Once, whilst I was living in lodgings, I was for nearly two months unable to remember to buy any postage-stamps. I remembered to buy them, that is to say, during the night, but not during the day, and the result was certainly the accumulation of a very large mound or tumulus of letters which needed a reply. When I left these lodgings and went elsewhere I threw all the letters into a white card-board hat-box and took them with me in a taxicab. My methodical habits stood me, as usual, in good stead. Scarcely a month had gone by when I received a very peremptory letter in my new abode, relating to some urgent family business affair and pointing out that the matter had been under my consideration now for nearly eleven weeks.

For some time I was at a loss. Then, happening to go into my bedroom, I noticed the white cardboard hat-box. Emptying it out on to the floor, I went carefully through the papers it contained, and sure enough, as I

Why I am a Bad Correspondent

had anticipated, the document in question was there. I was thus enabled to sit down instantly and write :

“DEAR COUSIN X,—On reference to my correspondence files I observe that your communication (unnumbered) of date —— contained the following words. . . .”

I then consulted the telephone-book to discover the nearest post-office which employed a special messenger service and sent my answer by hand. This only shows the importance of having a system.

I may remark here that I am entirely opposed to the practice of conducting family correspondence by means of the electric telegraph in order to secure an immediate reply. A near relative who indulges in this very unpleasing practice once sent to me a prepaid telegram inquiring on what date my second cousin Frederick was due to return from Ispahan, and I replied promptly enough, “Dunnoabit.” The telegraph-boy in our village happened to have mumps, and the telegram was brought by his young brother, who is not a uniformed servant of the State. When the lad had read my reply he took it first of all to the grocer, and then to the blacksmith, then to his mother

It Occurs To Me

and then to the potman of the village inn. I could see all this from my study window, and immediately came to the correct conclusion that they were all attempting to decipher the code. How they worked it out I was never able to discover, but I know that they all backed the wrong horse, and I became so unpopular that I was obliged to leave the place.

By letter alone I find it is possible to convey the exact shade of meaning I desire, but long care and deliberation are frequently necessary before I can commit the thought to paper. Often I map out the whole answer in my mind, even including the final adverb of endearment, directly the letter has been received, only to cast the model aside till the time when mature deliberation shall remould the phrases more nearly to my desire. That is the way in which I am dealing with the communication from Aunt Caroline, which has certainly not been lost, if someone will only look carefully in my dressing-room. One cannot be too tactful and cautious in dealing with these unexpected invitations to lunch or tea. Dinner seems easier, at least if very far ahead. But not dinner with Uncle Richard. . . .

It is not merely the effort of making a decision which bids me stay my hand. Too often these letters, which contain unprovoked

Why I am a Bad Correspondent

invitations to meals from friends and relations, are full of small pieces of family gossip and affectionate expressions of goodwill. To convey that precise shade of affability and cordiality in my reply which I desire to convey is always a torture to my sensitive mind, and as the weeks wear on I begin to feel that I am perhaps doing better service by leaving my sentiments unexpressed.

Let us suppose, for instance, that Aunt Caroline and Uncle Richard, who are not, I am grieved to say, upon the best of terms, should happen during the next six months to meet. Both of them since they saw each other last have written letters to me (we will call me Z).

"Have you heard anything of Z lately?" Aunt Caroline will begin for want of anything better to say to the fine old egg.

"Nothing whatsoever. I wrote to him a long time ago, but of course he hasn't replied."

"How characteristic of him. Just what happened to me. I should think he's the laziest and most casual creature who ever existed in the world."

This conversation will establish at once a bond of sympathy between dear Uncle and dear Aunt and make them feel far more friendly to each other than they have felt for years. I shall have been, as it were, a kind of mediator

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between them. Prompt answers, on the other hand, would have presented my own character in a much more agreeable light to each of them, but would have left them still at loggerheads. Thus my unselfishness and delicacy of feeling will have triumphed once more.

To return to Uncle Richard's letter. I intend to seek an early opportunity of reconsidering the provisional draft of my reply, very likely to-morrow evening, if the inspiration seizes me and I am feeling up to the mark.

25. Science

ONCE upon a day there was a King, and to his Court came three Magicians. Two of them were old and had long white beards and peaked caps, and their robes were covered with mysterious symbols which nobody could understand. They had a great deal of apparatus with them, and so had the third magician, who was a young man with a bold firm face and wore a fashion of clothing, which in that country appeared peculiar, but to us seems ordinary enough.

“What do you want?” asked the King, leaning on the shoulder of his Fool, who as a matter of fact was his only counsellor.

And the First Magician said :

“I and my friend here are alchemists. We know everything that was known by Hermes Trismegistus, and we have studied the works of Gebir, the Arabian, who wrote ‘The Summit of Perfection,’ and we understand all the properties of gold and mercury and arsenic and sulphur. We have furnaces and alembics and aludels. We are also skilled in infusions

It Occurs To Me

and decoctions and sublimation and fixation, lixiviation, filtration, coagulation——”

“Everything, in fact, that ends with a nation,” interrupted the Fool, striking him smartly on the head with his bladder. But the old man continued :

“We have read the works of Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon who explained to Pope Nicholas the Fourth the properties of liquefied gold ; and we are acquainted with Raymond Lully and Basil Valentine and Paracelsus. We have discovered the alkahest.”

“And what then ? ” inquired the King, stifling a yawn.

“I, O King,” said the First Magician, “have discovered a preparation which confers immortality upon mankind ; and my friend here has the Desirable Stone, which turns all metals into gold. For from being Adepts we became Philosophers, and from being Philosophers we are now Wise.”

“Deary me ! ” said the King. And then, turning to the Third Magician—“And what can you do ? ” he inquired.

“I, O King, have discovered the secret of Perpetual Death.”

“And what on earth is the point of that ? ” asked the Fool.

“It is very useful against the King’s enemies.

Science

I have a Secret Ray that can wither everything that lives. It can also stop a motor-car twenty yards away."

"That would be helpful in crossing the streets of the capital," observed the Fool.

"Well, what do you advise me to do about it all?" asked the King, turning to him.

"You must impose," said the Fool, "a test. Begin with the old man who spoke first. Let him enter a motor-car and let the Third Magician turn his Secret Ray upon him. But see that before that he has drunk his Elixir of Immortal Life."

So the test was applied. And the First Magician was withered up so that he died, and the motor-car was stopped very suddenly twenty yards away from the death-dealing machine.

"Though, after all," observed the Fool thoughtfully, "it was only a Ford car."

"That disposes of *him*," said the King gratefully to the Third Magician. "I rather like your Secret Ray. What do you want for it?"

"A thousand million golden crowns," he replied.

"That, I think, is where I come in," said the Second Magician, stepping forward; "if your

It Occurs To Me

Majesty will take me to the Treasury where the copper coins from the tax-collectors are."

So all the copper in the King's Treasury was transmuted into gold.

"There seems to me, Sire," observed the Fool suddenly, "a certain disadvantage in buying this Secret Ray. It is very cumbersome to work, and even though it might kill the King's enemies the magician might go on from us and sell it also to them."

"We can keep him here," replied the King.

"Even so," said the Fool, "the secret might be stolen, or there might be a revolution."

"You think of everything!" cried the King. "It is better that the secret should perish at once. The more so as I can then keep all this gold."

So he ordered the Third Magician to be executed. The sentence was carried out in the palace courtyard by the troops of the royal bodyguard, who, not understanding the Secret Ray, used ordinary bows and arrows.

The Second Magician was created Wizard-in-Ordinary to the King, and sat always on his left hand. But a few weeks later a message was brought to the King from a foreign land which lay overseas, to say that the bankers of the world had decided to abolish the gold

Science

standard. Livid with fury, the King ordered the Second Magician to be killed in his turn.

“What am I to do?” he said petulantly to the Fool. “I have lost the Secret of Perpetual Life and the Secret of Perpetual Death; and now even my treasured gold is of no avail.”

“There is always hellebore,” replied the Fool. “I could prepare you some of that myself.”

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